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The church as a local
organisation: A comparative
case study in the Sociology
of organisations

Kenneth John Roberts, BA.

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Warwick

Department of Sociology

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Summary

This thesis uses a comparative case study as the means for demonstrating how the policies and attitudes of local churches are influenced by organisational factors. A model based on open systems theory reveals that each local church mediates and processes a variety of environmental inputs. As a result, the inputs are converted into outputs or products. The model, therefore, draws attention to the relationship between the churches and their environment and also to their internal structures and processes.

In this instance a single input was followed through 'the system'. This concerned the question of the response of local churches to high levels of unemployment, and associated socio-political issues. The resultant data underlines how important for these churches is their 'religious' environment, particularly when it involves their parent denominations. The main finding, however, is that the two churches investigated were both able to mediate and modify environmental inputs on unemployment. It is, therefore, the 'internal' politics and organisational structures of local churches which are of prime importance.

Despite the fact that these churches had different politics, it was possible to discern in each case the key interaction between formal and informal organisational structures and processes, and how these related to the position and activities of agents such as the minister and lay leaders. It was found, in more specific terms, that the most crucial influence on the internal processes of these churches came from the ministers.

The investigation required a fourteen-month period of intensive fieldwork during which the writer was a participant observer in both churches. Other methods of data collection used included both structured and unstructured interviews and the monitoring and analysis of a wide range of secondary material.

The findings presented here are a contribution to both the sociology of organisations and the sociology of religion. They also illustrate the value of ethnographic studies of the church in its manifestation as a local organisation.

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PREFACE

This thesis is based on a comparative case study of two nonconformist churches situated in the industrial valleys of South-east Wales. I was born just eight miles away and was a chapel leader for almost twenty years. Most of the links between my biography and the data being presented are described in the main text. At this stage, however, it is necessary to provide a brief outline of my career in the local church.

My family were immigrants from the West Country. They settled eventually in the mining village of Aberfan. Though they were English Baptists they elected to join a new cause, affiliated to an obscure denomination (The Churches of Christ now part of the United Reform Church). By the time I was born, in 1936, both my father and grandfather were established and respected church leaders.

At the age of fifteen I preached my first sermon during an 'open' meeting. A year later I was elected secretary of the youth club. Just before my twenty-first birthday, I succeeded my father as superintendent of the Sunday School. I was still in my twenties when I was made church secretary, then secretary of the South Wales District of the Churches of Christ. My career reached its peak in the 1960's when at various times I held the posts of church secretary, district secretary, newsletter editor, organist, Sunday School superintendent, and deacon.

My circumstances, and those of Hope Chapel, changed considerably after the 1966 Aberfan disaster. Twenty-two members of the Sunday School were killed in the tip slide.

Two church families moved away. Then the building was found to be unsafe and had to be demolished. During the same period a number of the older church leaders died. As a result of these events the decision was made to disband the congregation while individual members were encouraged to join a nearby English Baptist Church.

My interest in the church had waned due primarily to my involvement with the community development project begun after the disaster. This was to lead to a full-time post as a community worker with the whole of 'The Valleys'¹ as my catchment area.

It was these experiences that surfaced when I set out to study the local church. They also account for the emphasis given here to organisational factors. After all, much of my work with the church and the community had involved administration and the marshalling and mobilisation of resources. In this was I was seeking to make the local church (and other local voluntary organisations) both more appealing and more effective.

The presence of these strong biographical links makes it difficult to pinpoint the source of the ideas and arguments being presented. In most instances, they are the product of an interaction between my past, the literature and discussions with respondents, friends and colleagues. Care has been taken to support my personal recollections with documentary evidence. For example, my Hope Chapel days were recorded in the diaries I kept as secretary, in the official

¹ One result of this project was that 'The Valleys' became accepted as a convenient title for this part of South Wales.

minute books, and in Contact the church newsletter. This data was supplemented by interviews with former colleagues, one of whom, Cyril Johnson a fellow deacon, took an active part in this project.

He was one of several 'chapel people' whose advice and insights helped in the formative stages. Special mention must be made of two: Dennis Monger, a Baptist minister for over twenty-five years who is involved with denominational affairs at district and national level, and Erastus Jones, another minister with vast experience and a former secretary of the Council of Churches for Wales.

The academic community yielded many willing to advise and help. Again, special thanks are due to Ivan Oliver of the University of Warwick, Teresa Rees of University College, Cardiff, and Rhys Pryce of the Open University. My most consistent source of support, encouragement and discipline was my supervisor, Dr Ian Proctor of the University of Warwick. The ESRC were patient and sympathetic during a time when the funding of research was a source of anxiety to all concerned.

One final but special word of thanks to the chapelgoers of Cwmtref who accepted me into their churches and their homes. Without their cooperation and openness it would not have been possible to mount an investigation from 'inside' the local church, and play the part of 'participant' as fully as that of 'observer'.

Ken Roberts

University of Warwick

April 1989

Introduction

The original outline for this thesis was formulated at a time when there was a great deal of publicity about the Christian Church's response to high unemployment, and other socio-political issues. At one stage the level of debate and disagreement within The Church prompted a critical observer to write, 'the churches are tormented by the assumption that they ought to do (or at least say) something about unemployment'. (Miller, 1984:73) While the debate was of obvious relevance to this study, it was also worth noting the various levels of religious organisation being described by the phrase 'the churches'. In the article quoted from the writer uses the phrase to refer to the mainstream denominations, the national and international ecumenical bodies and most often The Church of England. In fact, it omits just one type of religious organisation, the local or parish church.

Other publications of this period reveal a similar reluctance to recognise the contribution of local churches.

(e.g. Anderson, 1984; Paget-Wilkes, 1981; Preston, 1983; Ward, 1986) It seems, therefore, that this thesis with its fixed and clear focus on the local church is reversing a trend. Furthermore, it departs from another common practice in that it avoids the idea of 'the local church' as a pervasive social institution. The phrase is used here to describe individual local religious organisations. For it is only when it has been established that a local church is a different phenomenon to the local church that it becomes possible to contemplate research inside a local church in a similar way to that undertaken inside work organisations, (cf. Beynon, 1973; Bresnen, 1988; Crompton and Jones, 1984), or inside schools (cf. Ball, 1981; Burgess, 1983; Delamont, 1980; Hargreaves, 1967).

There is, however, a significant shortage of case studies of local churches of the type envisaged here. Dempsey (1964) provides an honourable exception with his study of lay-minister relations within an Australian Methodist Church. But my concerns were slightly narrower than Dempsey's. During my period as a leader of a local church (see preface) I became interested in the question of how the church could become a more effective local organisation. My view (not shared by all of my colleagues) was similar to that expressed by Ballard (1983): 'The [local] church not only has to provide a focus for worship and witness... it also has to make a contribution to the life of the neighbourhood'. (p.5) It was this perspective that led to my interest in the debate on unemployment mentioned above and, eventually, to use this issue as a means of investigating the organisational structure and processes of two individual local churches.

That early experience of mine had underlined the relevance of an issue of this kind. Many of my fellow leaders were committed to what they regarded as the fully compatible twin objectives of the spiritual conversion of individuals and recruitment to the organisation itself. (Towler, 1970-71:166) They could not, however, accept that these aims could be reconciled to those of the 'modernists' such as myself who were seeking to break down the barriers between the local church and the community. At the time a compromise had been struck. The church was allowed to intervene to some extent in local affairs, but the regulations on membership and access to the Lord's Supper (the communion service) were to be retained.

Now it was the local churches of the 1980's which were facing that same dilemma. Should they venture into the local community or should they retain a separatist and exclusive stance? It was unemployment, more than any other issue, which was forcing that question back on the agenda. The area of industrial South-east Wales in which this research was based had seen unemployment rise from 11.3 per cent in 1980 to 18.9 per cent in 1985. (Mid Glamorgan, E.P.R. Unit, 1986) Here, then, was a challenge to the local churches of this area and their policies and attitudes to local affairs.

It was, in fact, the first time since the economic depression of the inter-war period that these churches had faced a serious threat to their immediate environment. As the 1985 miners' strike and the subsequent programme of pit closures intensified the anxiety caused by high levels of unemployment, the phrase 'death of the Valleys' communities' began to appear in letters to the editors of The Merthyr Express and The South Wales Echo. In these circumstances, it seemed reasonable that some local churches would feel the compulsion to say or do something about unemployment. Even so, past experience indicated that other churches may fail to respond or even respond in a negative manner, taking the opportunity to attack the whole notion of the Church intervening in socio-political affairs. To borrow a categorisation from Parry and Morriss (1982), the reaction and response of any given local church to high local unemployment could be positive, negative, or neutral.

Though the nature and extent of such responses is of interest, the focus of this thesis is on the question of what determines these varied responses. It was the consideration

of this question that led to the recognition and examination of Beckford's(1975) claim about the importance of organisational factors, and their neglect by many of those who write about religion. (pp.6-9)

As Martin(1978) has pointed-out, the local church is not only an organisation, it is the most persistent of all [local] voluntary organisations. (p.300) He could also have noted that it is unusual in that not many local, voluntary organisations have at least one building, a paid, professional leader, and the support of a well-resourced parent organisation; all benefits taken for granted by many local churches. Furthermore, it is a form of association which has stood the test of time with many of the individual causes in South Wales being founded at the turn of the century or even earlier. (The Baptist Church featured here was established in 1896, the Methodist Society in 1912.)

Yet longevity and apparent stability have not always been regarded as positive virtues. Among those critical of the local church can be found Wickham(1957) who drew attention to the way the accepted form of organisation was no longer meeting [local] needs. Some such as Clark(1984) and Earle(1961) have suggested that many problems have stemmed from the fact that local churches have become organisations when they should have developed into Christian 'communities'. Whatever the drawbacks of these long-established forms of organisation, the shape they have taken does have consequences and, therefore, requires investigation. (Jackson, 1974)

It was this need which prompted Hinings and Foster(1973) to provide a model of the organisational structure of churches.

They draw attention to the continuing influence of the Weberian definition of bureaucracy as demonstrated in the work of Troelstch, 1931; O'Dea, 1966; Johnson, 1957, and Weber (1965) himself. At this stage, however, it is the influence of these organisational characteristics rather than their categorisation that has to be substantiated. In this respect, Thung (1987:343) argues that it is the formal system of administration and organisation which prevents the local church turning toward the world or, in her words, becoming 'a missionary church'.

While this thesis shares Thung's (ibid.) approach to some extent its tone is less prescriptive. It is not intended to be a critique of the church-community relationship, nor of the efficiency and validity of the method of organisation used by the local churches being investigated. The broad aim is to describe and analyse the part played by organisational factors in determining the policy and attitudes of two particular local churches. Chapter 1 elaborates the reasons for this approach and outlines the theoretical framework used.

It was this desire to explore the effects of its form of organisation on the life and work of a church that led to the choice of two churches which, despite many features in common, have solved the problems of administration and organisation in different ways. One is a branch of the Methodist Church and is based in a large Central Hall. The other also has a large building but is a Baptist Church affiliated to the Baptist Union of Wales. Chapters 2 and 3 provide a full picture of the development of these churches and their present and historical contexts. While the information presented there reveals a certain amount of shared experience, it is the

differences between these two churches which are regarded as more crucial by this thesis.

These differences can be observed at many levels and emerge in unexpected ways. Both of these churches, for example, share similar socio-economic and historical contexts along with a common Nonconformist heritage. So, as 'Free Churches' they use similar forms of teaching and preaching and of training their ministers. But the Free Churches have never been a homogeneous movement, 'either historically or theologically, either in practice or theory'. (Payne, 1965:130-31) One consequence of this contradiction has been the vitiation of attempts at practical cooperation due to the continued existence of notions of competition and exclusivity. (Ballard, 1979; Payne, 1965)

Chapter 5 of this thesis examines some of the ramifications of this inter-church relationship, particularly where there are established inter-organisational links. It is one example of how an organisation can be influenced by its environment in that, it can be posited, the fact that these two churches are connected to the ecumenical movement makes the radical socio-political ideas of the larger ecumenical organisations (The World and British Council of Churches) available to them. What then about the even closer connection which exists between these churches and their 'parent' denominations?

This question is discussed at length in Chapter 4 while Chapter 1 considers the theoretical and methodological problems posed by the congregation-denomination relationship. These loom large in this study simply because the organisational structure of the Methodist Church produces a much different

set of relations than does the polity of the Baptist Church. The 'unitive' structure of the Methodist Church puts the local society in a subordinate position to the denomination while the 'federative' polity of the Baptist Church grants a measure of autonomy, and ultimate authority, to the local congregation. (Cantrell et al, 1981; Harrison, 1969)

If that basic organisational variation is applied to the topic of this thesis it would suggest that the influence of the Methodist Church on Cwmtref Central Hall's response to unemployment will be greater than that of the Welsh Baptist Union on the response of Cwmtref Baptist Church. A broad hypothesis of this kind does illustrate the approach taken to the topic, but the investigation and explanation are pitched at a much lower level and, inevitably, are more complex. This is due, in part, to the decision to provide a comparative case study and, to a larger extent, to the need to provide a full and comprehensive picture of all the organisational structures and processes involved. For even if we accept that local churches can be categorised as formal organisations (Blau and Scott, 1970) it still has to be recognised that their response to unemployment may involve formal and informal organisational processes and procedures, as well as the political activity of agents or actors. Chapter 6 and 7 in particular reveal the close interaction between these organisational factors and how they operate within the lives of these two local religious organisations.

This thesis, therefore, seeks to demonstrate that any consideration of how 'The Church' responds to socio-political issues such as unemployment must take the organisational factors involved fully into account. In presenting this argument attention is drawn to the significant differences which exist

between local churches, even those who belong to the same tradition. This study also brings into focus the different levels of organisations within the Christian Church and how they affect the life and work of its most basic unit, the local congregation. Perhaps its most vital contribution is to reveal the richness and complexity of the life that exists within these local churches. It is this view of the church as an individual local organisation, with a responsibility for many of its own affairs, which brings into closer focus the question of why 'the church' so often seem unresponsive to the problems of the people and localities it purports to serve.

1: The church as a local organisation

The uncertainty about how much attention should be given to the church at the level of the locality is reflected by many of the British community studies. As Bell and Newby (1971:175-85) point out, the local church was featured in the study of Glossop (Birch, 1959), the two studies of Banbury (Stacey, 1960; 1975), and of Swansea (Brennan et al, 1954). Yet, Frankenburg (1966) in his review of the same genre notes that the study of Ashton (Dennis et al, 1957) devotes 'less than a page to the churches of the town because of their decline in importance since the 1920's'. (p.138)

These variations in treatment could be attributed to the perspective adopted by the researchers. There are those who are concerned chiefly with matters of religious belief and practice and its impact on the life of the locality. This approach was favoured in many of the inter-war studies such as those by Baake (1933) and the Men at Work report (1936), can be traced through Wickham (1957) to Clark (1984), and includes the theoretical contributions of writers such as Wilson (1982) and Roof (1976).

There are others, however, who are more concerned with the social, cultural, and political role of the local church, rather than its purely religious function. Stacey (1960:1975), for example, goes to some lengths to identify the non-religious links between church and community, and also recognises that the 'local church' is made-up of a number of diverse groups and organisations. This kind of explicit and detailed exploration of the more secular aspects of the church's influence owes much to Pope (1942), and can be found in many later works such

as Ben Rees(1975), Brennan et al(1954), Moore(1974), Rex and Moore(1967).

There is, of course, a great deal of cross-referencing between the two approaches. Even so, they do, illustrate what is an important methodological and theoretical distinction. Thus we can compare those who tend to see the local church as a homogeneous (if amorphous) local institution with those who recognise (often implicitly) that local churches are individual, semi-autonomous, voluntary organisations. This study uses the second viewpoint and takes it a step further by suggesting that the focus should be on the churches themselves rather than on the community. So while most of the writers mentioned above have tended to view the local church from the vantage point of the community, this investigation moves beyond the church doors and takes up a position within the two local churches being studied.

It seems that this bid to define local churches as separate, individual organisations, has been aided by the process of secularisation: 'whereas religion once entered into the very texture of community life, in modern society it operates only in interstitial places in the system'. (Wilson, 1982:155) Thus we find that 'the church has been reduced to the level of other organisations competing in the "open market" for the time and attention of the general population'. (Towler, 1971:164) Even David Lyon(1985), who is critical of many contributions to the secularisation debate, accepts that organised religion has been pushed to the edge of society and that 'the churches are becoming more like voluntary or other organisations, which offer certain services to the community' (pp.60,61)

The gulf that has appeared between the local churches and their immediate environment does give greater credence to the idea that each 'branch' of the church can be treated as a single organisation. Even so, the labels which served to blur the distinctions between these organisations are still in use. In this case it is phrases such as 'The Free Churches' or 'Welsh Nonconformity' which can be misleading. Payne (1965) noted that the Free Churches are not the homogeneous movement suggested by such categorisations. As for Welsh Nonconformity, its existence and influence during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries cannot be denied. Yet, nonconformist churches in Wales during this period were often jealous of their individuality and sought to preserve their particular theological and cultural traditions and practices. (Day and Fitton, 1978; Morris, 1984)

It is this separatist and often competitive aspect of Welsh Nonconformity that comes to the fore in this study which features two congregations - one Methodist, one Baptist - who despite their nonconformist heritage have different beliefs, practices, organisational structures, policies and attitudes.

When considering the need to be aware of the differences between local churches, it should be noted that these extend to congregations who bear the same denominational label. One of the first to be interviewed for this project was a Baptist minister with over twenty-five years experience. He pointed out that in the South Wales area there were some Baptist congregations who claimed to be evangelicals, others who were extreme liberals, and a majority who were 'middle-of-the-road'. Methodist respondents suggested that a similar analysis could have been made of their denomination.

8 These observations lend support for the tactic of viewing 'the local church' in terms of single congregations. It is surprising, therefore, that so few researchers have ventured behind the church doors, especially when compared to the amount of research conducted inside schools. (e.g. Ball, 1971; Burgess, 1983; Hargreaves, 1967) Those, such as Clark (1982) or Dempsey (1964), who have paid the minutiae of local church life some attention have succeeded in revealing what a rich field of study it could be. Dempsey (ibid.) in particular, shares some of the interests underlying this research as he seeks to 'plot in detail, formal and informal structures...' (p.61) But despite his awareness of the importance of organisational factors, it has been argued that the more general interest in organisations and organisation theory has not been reflected by those who write about religion and the church. (cf. Beckford, 1975; Brothers, 1971; Davidson et al, 1969) A rather unexpected double indictment given that 'religious association provides the most resilient examples of voluntary association and the most successful examples of face to face groups.' (Martin, 1978:300)

This thesis accepts that claim, and that organisation theory, or the sociology of organisations, can be used to provide a convincing description and analysis of individual local churches. Some would argue the contrary. Ball (1987) suggests that 'organisation theory and the sociology of organisations has little to tell us about the way [schools] are run on a day to day basis'. (p.1.) He points to the problems caused by the 'concrete messiness of empirical research inside schools', and the neglect of the conflictual aspects of school life arising from the use of organisation theory. (idem.) It could be argued that churches tend to be less 'messy' and conflict-

ridden than schools, if only because their activities take place on a Sunday by Sunday rather than day by day basis, and are not characterised by overt conflict. They remain, of course, complex organisations which call for a resourceful and imaginative approach. But it would be unwise to rule-out the use of organisation theory on the basis of the rather limited empirical evidence presented by Ball(1987).

This point can be underlined with some fairly basic observations. One is that most of the congregations similar to those studied in this project have a low level of activity. There are a few local churches who attempt to provide a full programme and extensive facilities, both for their own congregations and for their locality. But in many cases the local churches of South-east Wales only function properly on one day a week, a Sunday. For while seventy-one per cent have mid-week meetings, these may be just a single women's meeting. Twenty-seven per cent of churches in this area are limited to just one service per Sunday. (Brierly and Evans, 1983:56) And even where there is a full range of subsidiary groups and activities, they are unlikely to fill more than four evenings a week, leaving long periods of inactivity. This means that there are very few occasions when the church and all its members meet and 'work' at the same time and in the same place. Amongst the implications arising from this comparatively low level of activity is the opportunity it gives to the researcher to 'cover' the activities of the organisation more comprehensively than those who investigate the constant, varied, and simultaneous activities taking place in the [local] school.

When it comes to the question of conflict Ball(1987) uses the phrase 'arenas of struggle':

I take schools, in common with virtually all other social organisations, to be arenas of struggle, to be riven with actual or potential conflict between members; to be poorly coordinated; to be ideologically diverse.

(p.19)

It is difficult to argue against such a catch-all definition, particularly when those of us who have had extensive experience of individual local churches can recall periods when Ball's (1987) theoretical point could be used as empirical description. It is also true that many of those working within the sociology of religion are concerned with conflict, especially the conflict between clergy and laity. (eg. Clark, 1984; Houghland and Wood, 1979; Ingrams, 1980, 1981; Perry and Hoge, 1981) This does not mean, however, that the danger of taking Ball's (1987) view too much for granted should be ignored. But for the present, the most important issue arises from his claim that 'systems theory has failed to account for this level of conflict in that it regards conflict as aberrant and pathological'. (p.4) (Oddly enough, the 'social actors' whose accounts should be 'given priority' Ball (1987:27) regarded conflict as 'abberant and pathological'.)

Leaving aside, therefore, the unresolved question of the level of conflict within local churches we turn to the broader issue of the usefulness of organisational theory in general, and systems theory in particular. In this instance we take the advice of Beckford (1975), who suggests that an open systems APPROACH to the study of religious organisations is both valid and useful. I have emphasised the word approach simply because open systems theory is being used here as an overall analytical framework which facilitates the collection, description, and analysis of data. In doing this I adopt a different position

to Ball(1987) who uses an already available data base to support his criticism of organisation theory. The next section provides an outline of systems theory and the way it is deployed in this study.

Systems Theory

This study makes use of the most basic and characteristic assumptions of systems theory. In general terms, it has been seen to imply a social world characterised by law and order and regulation. (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:93) Systems theory also presents a view of organisations as being made up of interdependent parts intergrated by their need for survival. (Pugh et al, 1983) To meet these needs, a set of internal processes are employed in order that a variety of inputs can be transformed into outputs or, put another way, these internal processes are concerned with an exchange with [the organisation's] environment which involves transactions of importing and exporting (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:59; Pugh et al, 1983:93) Critics of the theory point to its deterministic orientation with actors being seen as constrained by impersonal mechanisms. Associated with this view is the accusation of reification which suggests that social systems can be accorded the capability of thought and rational action. (Astley and Van de Ven, 1983; Silverman, 1970) These apparent weaknesses will be examined later, first, however, a brief outline of the theory's usefulness.

Rudge(1969) suggests that some of the strengths of open systems theory is that it is able to portray the way organisations respond to change. So while organisational structures have a pattern this should not be regarded as a blueprint. At the same time it is a theory which can lead toward an examination

of the way a system is organised internally, as well as of its relationship with its environment. (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:18) It provides, therefore, a view of an organisation which lays equal stress on its relations with its environment, and on the internal transactions which mediate that relationship and transform the inputs from the environment into the organisation's outputs.

If these insights were applied to the issues examined in this thesis the 'output' would be the response of these local churches toward socio-political problems. In assessing how this output was produced a range of 'inputs' related to these problems would need to be investigated along with the way the inputs were processed and mediated by the individual churches. Here, then, is what appears to be an attractively symmetrical methodological device which affords, if nothing else, a rounded view of the organisation. This assessment can be taken a stage further if the three central analytical categories used in systems theory are looked at in turn. In the next section, therefore the notion of 'the environment' is discussed, followed later by the 'internal processes' and, finally, 'the output'.

The environment

Many studies, as Beckford (1975) notes, pay attention to the way religious organisations relate to their social, cultural and political environment. In his opinion the impetus for these studies came mainly from Pope's (1942) analysis of the links between socio-economic interest groups and [local] religious organisations. Beckford (1975:17) is critical of the consequent 'series of attempts to classify church organisations which focused narrowly on the purely socio-economic determinants'.

Even so, these studies do provide a comprehensive picture of the relationship between the local church and its immediate environment. Some, such as Roof(1976) and Wilson(1982), suggest that the fortunes of the local church are inextricably linked to that of the locality it serves. Cantrell et al(1983) emphasise the ways the local church may influence its environment through the provision of norms on which community decisions are based. Thung(1987), however, is more concerned with the reciprocal nature of the relationship, while suggesting that the environment does determine the political attitudes of church members (rather than theology) (p.345).

Some have moved beyond the question of the nature of the relationship to investigate the mechanisms which couple the local church to its environment. This has been a major concern of those observers of the secularisation process and who have seen it as an 'uncoupling of church and society'. (Lyon, 1985:33) Writers such as Wickham(1957) were prompted by concern about the effects (mainly on the church) of the weakening of the coupling mechanisms. By and large, however, those who have been interested in the way the local church is linked to its environment have taken a less subjective view of the church-community relationship. (cf. Brennan et al, 1954; Ben Rees, 1975; Clark, 1982; Day and Fitton, 1978)

That basic theoretical assumption, that there is a reciprocal relationship between church and community, is not being challenged in this thesis. Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that it was extremely difficult to supply the empirical data needed to justify that assumption. This may be a more acute problem at Cwmtref than in most other localities, even

in South Wales. Certainly, the situation was much different to the one described in my study of post-disaster Aberfan (Roberts, 1985) where there was a strong network of social and religious links between church and community organisations and their leaders. At Cwmtref, however, there was little direct and observable evidence which would indicate a formal structural link between the churches and their locality, nor of the informal or individual interaction which was observed, for example, by Stacey (1960) in Banbury. This applied to all aspects of the town's associational life, including politics which was once a rich source for those seeking to identify mechanical links between 'the chapel' and 'the community'. (Bell and Newby, 1971:185)

A survey of the two congregations revealed just one person who was involved both with the church and with local politics. At the time he was a member of the Baptist Church, though he and his family had once belonged to Central Hall. According to many respondents, he had never shown a strong and practical commitment to either church. If this was the case, it is unwise to propose a causal connection between his religious affiliation and his political career. Perhaps it was the presence of this type of uncertain empirical data which led Clark (1982) to use the hazy concept of a religious 'underlife' as a way of maintaining the church-community relationship. (p.164)

The inadequacy of the data was less of a problem for this thesis simply because it has not attempted to answer the broad question of 'what is the relationship of these local churches to their environment?'. Instead, it concerns itself with those aspects of the church-environment relationship which may have influenced the way these churches responded to socio-

political issues such as unemployment. The choice of a narrower topic enabled boundaries to be set on the scale of the field research, and also guided the choice of theories and methods as described in the next chapter. Even so, the need to trace the source of the outputs on this specific topic meant that a full description of the environment of these churches had to be obtained in order to identify those environmental influences which were relevant to the issue of unemployment. It was this exercise which revealed the situation mentioned above of two churches whose links with their environment were severely circumscribed.

What had been revealed by the preliminary field research, was a range of outputs which were restricted mainly to what I have termed the 'religious' environment. This is a broad categorisation used to cover the links between the congregations and their parent denominations, also with the organised ecumenical movement at various levels, plus those informal and unstructured connections with other churches, individual Christians, or less well-recognised Christian movements. Careful attention has been paid, therefore, to what was previously called the 'coupling mechanisms', whether in the form of formal, codified administrative structures, or of informal, often interpersonal, processes and relations. Whatever the 'mechanics' involved, the broad aim remains the same; to observe how environmental inputs are mediated, processed, and converted into the congregations' own outputs. Systems theory, therefore, provides a clear overall picture of the relationship between these local churches and their environment.

One question remained: could the denomination be fairly described as part of the environment? This problem arises because a systems model requires the presence of a boundary between an organisation and its environment. (Burrell and Morgan, 1987: 63) The impression given by a number of writers in the sociology of religion is, that the denomination and the congregation are almost inter-changeable, with the individual church being either integrated into the denominational structure, or, at the least, replicating it at a lower level. (Clark, 1984; Ingrams, 1980: 81; Nelson and Hiller, 1980)

There exists, however, another body of work which demonstrates the lack of fit between congregation and denomination. (Clark, 1982; Harris, 1969; Moore, 1974; Norman, 1976; Rex and Moore, 1967) It may well be that the notion of a boundary would overstate the breakdown in congregation-denomination relations described by these writers. Nevertheless, the image of distancing, of resistance, sometimes of outright conflict, is strong enough to suggest that, in these particular studies, the denomination was regarded more as part of the environment and less as an integral part of the same organisation.

Even so, it is difficult to apply the notion of denomination as environment in the form of a clear, unchanging analytical category. It poses less of a problem when applied to Cwmtref Baptist Church, mainly because the overall Baptist polity does allow for a measure of congregational autonomy. (Russell, 1980) It is the 'unitive' nature of the Methodist polity which poses the greatest challenge. (Cantrell et al, 1981) But in those cases where the denomination could not be regarded as part of the environment, it could be accorded a prime position in the process of mediating inputs. That is, the denomination becomes an essential part of the congregations' leadership and, as one writer has noted,

it is the 'leadership' [that] regulates transactions' across the boundary between the organisation and its environment. (Rudge;1969: 230)

In the event, both of these analytical categories are used. There appeared to be no justification for making an arbitrary selection from the two, particularly as the exercise of comparing two disparate organisational structures indicates the need for a measure of flexibility. At the same time, these categories had to be applied rigorously. As the next section demonstrates, the role and position of the denomination has considerable bearing on the internal processes of these local churches.

Internal Processes

When an approach based on open systems theory is used, the first aspect of the internal processing of inputs to be considered, is that of mediation. As suggested earlier, this tends to be regarded as a function of leadership. The local churches featured in this study had two separate and sometimes conflicting types of leaders; the full-time, professional clergy, and the lay leaders chosen from the congregation. So the question of who regulates environmental inputs, leads directly to the questions of clergy authority and the continuing debate about the clergy-laity relationship. (Carroll, 1981; Dempsey, 1964; Harrison, 1969; Ingrams, 1980; 1981)

But open systems theory also gives an indication of how, at a more general level, the internal processes of an organisation can be conceptualised. According to Ball (1987:4) the key concept for systems theorists is structure. Because of this, he argues, they provide a reified view of the organisation which suggests that 'the organisational framework encompasses and gives order to people and events within it'. (p.4)

Burrell and Morgan(1979),however,come near to conceding that systems theory can have a degree of flexibility.They place it under a large functionalist umbrella,which also covers approaches with an emphasis on agency as opposed to structure, such as Silverman's(1970) 'action frame of reference'.(p.121) A little earlier they describe how Weber's theory of bureaucracy was synthesised with human relations theory during the 1950's. (p.119)

Attempts at synthesising these apparently disparate perspectives have continued.Astely and Van de Ven(1983) provide a more recent example.They argue that both environment and structure are enacted to embody the meanings and actions of individuals.(p.249) Bartunek(1984)travels in the same direction as she used the notion of interpretive schemes,developed by Ranson et al(1980),and others,to show how the 'provinces of meaning' of organisational members are drawn upon 'to validate, legitimize,and modify the structure of organisations'.(pp.355-56) She makes a further observation which is useful for this study,namely that the effects and influences of the environment, size,and technology of an organisation,are not experienced directly but 'mediated by powerful organisational members who perceive and enact them in previous ways.'(p.355)

It has been acknowledged,therefore,that systems theory with its structural orientation may not provide a full picture of the internal processes of an organisation.I am going to take a similar position and bring into use a model which synthesises a mixture of theoretical perspectives.This model is based on the work of Watson(1987).He underlines the need to be aware of both the formal and informal practices of an

organisation while recognising that the heart of any [work] organisation will be the 'official control apparatus'.(p.169)

In order to meet those demands he draws on two major theoretical insights. The first comes from Silverman's(1970) contention that organisations are not pre-given structures into which people are slotted, but the 'outcome of the interactive patterns of human activity'.(p.204) The second involves the concept of organisational culture. This Watson(1987) traces back to Selznick(1949), but he credits Pettigrew(1979) with its 're-discovery'.(p.206)

It is when these two insights are added to the awareness of the central place of formal structures, that Watson(1987) is able to proclaim a synthetic model which 'sees the official control structure as being dialectically related to the unofficial aspects of structure'. These 'unofficial aspects of structure' are those which cover the [whole] range of micropolitical activities. He points out that these are only 'conceptually or analytically distinct aspects of what is really one overall organisational structure'. In essence, therefore, they are dialectically related in that 'they are influenced by each other, and that activities in one encourages activities in the other'.(p.209)

The potential value of this model can be demonstrated if it is applied to some of the more obvious characteristics of the two organisations being studied. For example, the notion of formal structures and practices leads us to examine a range of codified procedures, which include the regulations of the Methodist Church and the 'home produced' constitution of Cwmtref Baptist Church. At the same time it would be possible to identify the more detailed and routine administrative

processes which exist under those general frameworks.

But a preliminary investigation would also reveal that these procedures do not cover all the events and activities which take place in the local church. One example concerns the office of deacon. While the terms and conditions of this office are laid down in the church's constitution, and in the New Testament, it is possible to detect elements (such as social status) which are not covered by either. This finding is signalled by the observation that Baptist Churches avoid the complete codification of offices and procedures, in order to remain open to the revelation of the will of God. (Ingrams, 1981:43) It is the likely presence of such informal and discretionary factors that makes the concept of organisational culture an essential part of this model. (Watson, 1987)

Watson's (ibid.) definition of organisational culture should be noted: 'The system of meanings which are shared by members of an organisation, and defines good and bad, right and wrong, and the appropriate way for members to think and behave'. (p.205) Much of this is redolent of the concept of 'interpretive schemes', as elaborated by Bartunek (1984). In her study of a Roman Catholic woman's order, she demonstrates how provinces of meaning and interpretive schemes are susceptible to change. (pp.335-65) But it is also necessary to underline the strong sense of continuity in such schemes, and in the organisational cultures to which they contribute.

One example of that continuity was found in the links between the interpretive schemes of the respondents in this study and those held by their predecessors. So, even though the minister's role in Methodism has changed considerably, many of the criticisms made of the present minister were based on

interpretive schemes and a province of meaning which were now, officially, defunct. It seems, therefore, that the organisational culture had failed to keep pace with the changes in the formal organisational arrangements. While this example serves to illustrate the power of these cultural forces, it also shows the complex relationship between interpretive schemes and organisational structure. Bartunek (1984) claims that this is especially true of religious organisations, where there is a tendency for them to be closely intertwined. (p.357)

Because the notion of organisational culture is central to this model, the definition being used here should be noted. It can be expressed as the product of individual and group meanings which draw on experience, shared assumptions, and the interaction between new and old ways of understanding. (Watson, 1987; Bartunek, 1984) Evidence of the existence and nature of such a culture can be found in symbols, ideologies, language, beliefs, rituals and myths. (Pettigrew, 1979 quoted by Watson, 1987:206) Further evidence can be found in the more mundane features of organisational life and practice. Thus, for example, 'the way things are always done' can be seen as the sum of codified procedures, of 'common law' made by precedence, and of shared perceptions and 'views of the world'.

The fact that the informal and formal aspects of these internal processes are so closely intertwined increases the need to provide clear and consistent analytical categories. Watson (1987) therefore adds to his model what he describes as the 'internal politicking of [organisational] members' (p.208), together with the activities of interest groups and their 'competing rationalities'. (p.206) Or to put it in other

words, he seeks to account for that kind of 'free range' agent activities which cannot be regarded as structural, either in the formal or informal sense.

This, of course, is Ball's main area of interest and the one which, he argues, is not covered by conventional organisational theory. (1987:17-26) As suggested earlier, his emphasis on conflict and of competition between interest groups within schools may not apply directly to the more limited activities of local churches, particularly the two studied here with their underdeveloped structures. Even so, the concept of struggle and inter-group conflict does have some relevance. There is, of course, the heavily documented contest between clergy and laity. (Dempsey, 1964; Harrison, 1969; Herman, 1984; Ingrams, 1980:1981; Perry and Hoge, 1983) One feature of this, which accords with my own experience, is the possibility that auxiliary organisations of the church, under lay leadership, can take on the role of interest groups and involve themselves in political activity.

In this chapter so far, I have indicated how a theoretical approach based on open systems theory can be used to investigate both the external relations and internal processes of the local church. It is necessary, however, to provide a more detailed model for the investigation of the intricacies of the internal processes. Hence the use of a model which encompasses the distinction between formal and informal structures and processes, and micro-political activity, while recognising their dialectical relationship. For the final element -the outputs of the local church- it is open systems theory which once again provides a useful analytical approach.

Outputs

The use of an analytical framework based on open systems theory leads to a perspective on the local church which emphasises its organisational features, and how these are involved in receiving and processing inputs from its (mainly religious) environment and in turning these inputs into products or outputs. One function of this type of analytical framework is to limit the area of study. So far, it has allowed the selection of what are seen as 'key' environmental influences, and given a rather artificial order to the complexities of the internal processes. But as far as outputs are concerned, it is the thesis topic which appears to set the boundaries. For the purposes of this study it is the output of the local church on the question of unemployment and associated social issues, which is the main concern.

Yet, it must be admitted that these limitations are all rather unrealistic. However legitimate it may be as an analytical tactic, it is hardly credible that an investigation which begins by considering a wide range of inputs could end with a single output. To give one example. In looking at the environmental influence of the denomination the whole gamut of denominational outputs has to be considered, not just those concerned with socio-political issues. Furthermore, one way of answering the question of how the local church processes environmental inputs on unemployment, is to look at how it processes other inputs: those which are judged as more vital or important. Likewise, this single topic may not give a full picture of all the internal processes involved. Indeed, if the topic of

unemployment was followed 'through the system', in a simplistic fashion. those processes concerned with keeping socio-political issues off the agenda, may not be observed.

The objective, therefore, is to limit the area of investigation without imposing unnecessary and inflexible constraints. Hence the need for a fairly flexible definition of the term output. The phrase used throughout this study is 'the policy and attitudes of the local church(es)'. This embraces, once again, what can be described as the formal and informal. It is policy which has formal connotations and which can be linked to what are seen as 'key' decisions. Parry and Morriss (1982:21) use notions of conflicting policies or groups, and of decisions which 'must have the greatest significance for a political unit, members or leaders' as a means of categorising 'key' decisions. (see also Murray, 1986:81) While seeking to retain the insight provided by that categorisation, it is the notion that such 'key' decisions can be the product of both formal and informal processes and structures which is emphasised in this thesis. One example arising from the data is the decision made by the Church Council of Cwmtref Central Hall on the future of their building.

That decision will be examined as the output of the formal structures and procedures of the society. At the same time, however, there will be an attempt to relate this decision to the attitudes (interpretive schemes) of the Church Council and its individual members. This decision, therefore, is linked to the informal structures and processes (culture) of the organisation, and a range of political activity and social relations. In this way the notion of output (and that of 'environment') enhances the description and analysis of the internal structures and processes of these local churches.

But while due attention must be paid to such formal and key decisions, it should be noted that local churches are something of a special case, in that much of their output is not linked in any direct way to the decision-making process. This is because a major source of 'product' or 'output' is the pulpit. Some writers have focused on the pulpit as an important feature of the struggle between clergy and laity. (e.g. Ingrams, 1980: 1981) The emphasis in this study, however, is on the way the output from the pulpit reflects and influences the attitudes and policies of these churches.

Analysis of the output from the pulpit again leads back, as it were, to the processes, social relations, and culture of the organisation itself. Thus, for example, the Baptist pastor gains much of his authority from his privileged access to the pulpit. At Cwmtref, this was reinforced by the fact that the culture of this particular Baptist church allowed the pastor to control the use of the pulpit, and to establish the position of being almost the sole mediator of environmental inputs. Given this element of control, it was necessary to ask whether this was used to reinforce the congregation's existing province of meaning, or to modify it.

That straightforward example shows how useful the open systems concept of output can be. It serves to encompass the 'response' of these local churches to socio-political issues, and the way that environment and internal processes contribute to that response. In other words, it 'focuses on the way a system is organised internally and in relation to its environment'. (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:68) Such an approach meets the overall objectives of this thesis: to show how the way these two local churches was organised helped determine their response to the issue of high unemployment.

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2. Studying the local church: the research process

The gestation period for a post-graduate research project can be extremely short. In my case it only became a possibility toward the end of my final year as an undergraduate. It was then that I applied and was accepted for a linked award, a process which required an 'instant' research proposal. Given the haste and pragmatic nature of that initial decision, it may seem fortunate that this thesis is similar to many others, in that it reflects my personal, political, and sociological interests. (cf. Fuller, 1984; Hammersley, 1984; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Newby, 1977; Wallis, 1977) In fact, the task of matching those personal interests with the aims of the project to which I was to be linked was far from easy, and called for some imaginative negotiations.

Eventually, I reached the position of being able to justify the claim that the true origins of this thesis lay in my past experience and dated from that day when I was appointed secretary of Hope Chapel, Aberfan. It was that appointment, back in the late 1950's, that started my interest in local affairs or what at the time was called 'community'. Having a clearly defined area of interest does not necessarily make the selection of a thesis topic any easier (cf. Wallis, 1977), nor does it reduce the time and energy needed to 'formulate the 'problem' to be investigated. (cf. Newby, 1977) In this respect, being the recipient of a linked award was an advantage in that the need to articulate 'the link' gave the project -and the problem- some kind of shape.

From that exercise came the marrying of my interest with the theme of the overall project, which was unemployment. It has been suggested that at this early stage the researcher is armed with little more than a puzzle or a doubt about some phenomenon. (Hammersley, 1985:251) In my case it was a conviction rather than a doubt. I was convinced that time (and money) should be given to study the local manifestation of general problems such as unemployment. Not even the frustrations of attempts at 'community development' had changed that belief. (see Roberts, 1985) Even so, the pressure to convert the thought and ideas behind that belief into a coherent thesis, let alone a specific research problem, was inhibiting. The knowledge that 'a problem statement is not a prerequisite to field research' was of little comfort at the time. (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973:3) One research manual suggested that the 'problem' often emerged from the literature review. (idem) But it proved difficult to find a substantial body of literature which encompassed both 'community' and unemployment. There was some -mainly anecdotal- emerging from the recession of the late 1970's (e.g. Campbell, 1984, Seabrook, 1984) and also some from the inter-war period, but much of this was subjective and prescriptive. (e.g. Men without work, 1933; Wilkinson, 1939)

I am sure that even this ill-directed reading did help, but there were many other contributory factors to the discovery of the problem addressed in this thesis. Many of them can be traced to that 'social process' and the 'interaction' which characterises most sociological research. (Burgess, 1984:31) So the lengthy meetings with my supervisors were important. But it was the problem of scarce resources, together with the

expectation that the project should proceed in some semblance of the order indicated by the research manuals, that forced my hand. In other words, I was expected to produce a version of my research design before entering the field. When I attempted to provide this in the form of some kind of latter-day community study, I quickly realised how lack of resources can be a strong determining factor. (Bryman, 1988:11)

It was becoming obvious that my contribution to the debate on the local effects on unemployment would have to be based on a more modest scale. While the main aim was to scale-down the original design it, inevitably, led to a drastic modification. The new version of the research problem asked how was unemployment mediated at local level. One hypothesis was that it was mediated by a variety of local social institutions. With my background, it was to be expected that the institution to be of greatest interest would be the local church. Armed with the 'problem' of how the local church mediates unemployment, I undertook my first venture into the field. Even so, I had not yet found the 'overarching model or theory' advocated by Hammersley (1984:60-61).

That first period of fieldwork highlighted the conflict between the theoretical desirable and the practically possible. (Buchanan et al, 1988) The research design required a comparison of how local churches mediate the effects of unemployment. My personal circumstances dictated the range of the enquiry, the choice of a sample, and the methods to be used. Though a student at Warwick University, my home and family were in the South Wales Valleys. Hence the decision to make a comparison between the way the churches in Coventry were mediating unemployment

with the way the churches of South Wales were performing the same task.

The scale of the enterprise, and the large number of factors that could account for any differences between the churches being compared, indicated that quantitative methods would be required in order to measure the effects of what could be seen as the key variables. (Burgess, 1986) But this posed the problems of selecting those variables which could justifiably be regarded as 'key'. After all, the churches and areas to be compared had so many observable differences that identifying them, let alone categorising and ordering them, would be a lengthy and difficult process. These considerations did have some influence on the decision to re-appraise the objectives of the study, but the resultant change of direction owed more to my personal circumstances. (Burgess, 1984b:39) I had come to realise that I could no longer maintain what were virtually two homes and, therefore, would have to return to South Wales.

This personal crisis coincided with the growing conviction that the research design being used at the time was likely to produce a mass of descriptive data but little in the way of a theoretical insight. In other words, it would demonstrate that different kinds of churches in different kinds of areas did mediate the local effects of unemployment in different ways yet may not facilitate a clear explanation of these differences.

I was not the first researcher to experience the devastating effect of 'false starts and faux pas'. (Bryman, 1988:9) But the benefits of that preliminary work should not be underestimated. I arrived back in Wales with a new field of literature to review, mainly, at that stage, in the

Sociology of Religion. I also had a new 'problem'. The data I had gathered on the churches of Coventry had revealed a reaction to unemployment and other socio-political issues, which was far more radical and interventionist than that of those churches in South Wales surveyed in the same period. To some extent the comparison was unfair. Coventry's efforts were dominated by the cathedral and its massive resources. Even so, it made me aware that the most interesting question from my point of view was not the scale of the reaction, or its various manifestations, but in what ways was it influenced and determined. While this could be regarded as a subtle shift in emphasis it did, nevertheless, bring about a radical modification of the research design and of the thesis itself.

The 'overarching theme' remained; the relationship between the local church and its immediate environment. (Hammersley, 1984: 60) Now, however, the emphasis was on the churches themselves, and the crucial concept became that of reaction and response, rather than interaction. In theoretical terms, it became possible to reduce the number of contextual variables. That is by focusing on the churches themselves and a comparison of their response it became possible to compare churches that shared the same socio-economic and cultural context. Thus, the problems involved with comparing inner-city Coventry with industrial South Wales had been avoided, but now there was need to search for a suitable research site.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) note some of the difficulties arising out of the need to find a suitable, and convenient, setting or site for field research. (pp. 40-45) The question of convenience had already been partly answered by my

move back to South Wales. As for suitability, the two obvious criteria were high levels of unemployment and a range of active and viable local churches, but there was also the question of size and topography. Even though I was a lone researcher with limited resources, I was anxious to 'cover' as much of the proposed research site as the research design required.

The selection procedure began with a review of the current socio-economic condition in the industrial valleys of South-east Wales. I was also able to draw on a great deal of other material gathered by me during my time as a community worker in the same area. I supplemented this data with a short series of interviews with leading Churchmen[sic] who had a knowledge of the broad picture of the state of the churches in the Valleys. From this exercise came the conclusion that the majority of towns and villages in the region shared similar socio-economic conditions. (Ebbw Vale and the problem of the steel industry was one of the few exceptions). It also seemed safe to assume that most centres of population over a limit of around 5,000 inhabitants would be likely to have more than one viable local church. This, in turn, seemed to suggest that the final choice would rest on the question of convenience rather than suitability.

The tables reproduced below illustrate some of the steps taken in this selection process as well as putting Cwmtref in a wider socio-economic context. As tables 1-3 show, a short-list of eight town and villages was drawn-up. These were selected on the figures in Table 1, population size. The aim was to include small settlements of less than 10,000 inhabitants, then some medium-size towns of between 10-20,000 population and, finally, two of the larger Valley centres with over 20,000 inhabitants.

Table 1:Population

Area	Total	16-24	25-44	45-Pens.	Pens. +
Cwmtref	15.374	14.7	25.6	19.5	15.6
Aberdare	31.617	12.2	25.1	20.8	20.8
Pontypridd	29.796	13.3	25.7	18.4	18.4
Tredegar	16.203	13.6	24.3	18.6	18.6
Fer/Maerdy	8.911	13.2	24.1	21.3	19.4
Gelligaer	16.905	14.0	30.2	17.1	12.3
Rhymney	7.805	13.5	24.3	20.2	19.3
M/Vale	4.906	14.8	23.8	21.4	17.6
U.K.		14.1	26.3	19.7	17.7

(Selected from the 1981 Census, Urban Area statistics, OPCS.
Abbreviations: Fern/Maerdy= Ferndale/Maerdy; M/Vale= Merthyr Vale.)

These selected population figures suggested that some of the sites listed would probably be unsuitable. For example, the towns of Pontypridd and Aberdare seemed too large given the resources available. It was also possible that those at the other end of the scale such as Rhymney and Merthyr may not be large enough to support a network of local churches. Furthermore, I had some personal reservations about Gelligaer and Ferndale/Maerdy. It seemed to me that it would be even more difficult to describe these areas as 'a community' than usual, which would make any attempt to delineate a church-community relationship hazardous.

The fact that I was reducing the short-list on the evidence of one set of statistics and some subjective personal judgements was due to the anxiety felt about the amount of field work time I had 'lost' by my earlier false start. I wanted, therefore, to avoid any site which may on closer examination prove unsuitable. This suggested that it was safer to concentrate on the two medium size towns of Cwmtref and Tredegar. I was confident that they would contain a range of viable local churches. Then, when I looked at the other statistics quoted in tables 1 to 4, they appeared to

have a broadly similar socio-economic profile. In terms of occupational class structure (table 2) and overall unemployment rate (table 3) there were no significant differences. Table 4, however, did reveal that Tredegar had more workers in the manufacturing sector than Cwmtref and fewer in the basic 'heavy' industries. But by this time I was more concerned about a difference between them which I regarded as both more interesting and significant.

Table 2: Social Class of usual residents.

Area	I	II	III	III (Man.)	IV	V	Non Active
Cwmtref	1.7	6.3	7.2	33.9	14.2	4.1	30.0
Aberdare	3.1	11.7	6.0	29.8	13.2	5.3	29.9
Pontypridd	2.5	12.0	8.1	31.3	11.8	5.2	27.6
Tredegar	1.8	7.9	7.9	32.3	15.1	5.0	28.2
Fern./Maerdy	2.3	5.4	2.5	34.8	11.6	2.6	40.3
Gelligaer	3.3	14.0	8.5	31.7	13.5	3.9	23.7
Rhymney	0.6	9.7	3.4	23.7	15.9	4.6	36.9
M/Vale	0.5	4.9	7.0	24.0	20.2	7.4	33.5
U.K.	4.5	18.8	9.1	26.2	12.2	4.1	22.7

CLASSIFICATION: I Professional occupations; II Intermediate occupations, III Skilled occupations-non-manual; III (Man.) Skilled occupations-manual; IV Partly skilled occupations; V unskilled.

(N.B. Only economically 'active' heads of household have been assigned a social class. Figures show percentage of population in households with head in any given social class.

Selected from the 1981 Census, Urban Area statistics, OPCS.

Abbreviations: Fern/Maerdy = Ferndale/Maerdy; M/Vale = Merthyr Vale.)

While studying the socio-economic characteristics of the two sites I became aware of a distinguishing feature which was not covered by my original criteria - that of their historical background. Stated briefly, I had to make a choice between Tredegar, an early nineteenth century iron town, and Cwmtref, a settlement developed as a result of the coal boom in the second-half of the same century. They represented, therefore, two distinct periods in

the history of the South Wales Valleys which, as chapter three shows, produced different economic, social, and religious experiences. It was this variation in their historical development that was to prove conclusive when I made my final choice.

I was immediately attracted to the fact that Cwmtref was born of this latter period of industrialisation. One reason was an awareness of the comparative lack of academic interest in this

Table 3: Economic activity and unemployment of usual residents

Area	Men 16-64		Non-Employed	Women 16-59 (Married)		
	%Active	Employed		Active	Emp.	Non-Empl
Cwmtref	84.1	67.1	17.0	48.5	44.4	4.4
Aberdare	85.3	72.0	13.0	52.9	49.4	3.5
Pontypridd	86.5	73.0	13.5	57.9	54.1	3.8
Tredegar	84.5	67.2	17.3	50.0	46.4	3.5
Fern/Maerdy	81.3	65.4	15.9	46.1	39.5	6.7
Gelligaer	87.0	73.0	14.0	52.8	49.0	3.8
M/Vale	84.3	70.8	13.5	47.3	42.4	4.9
Rhymney	83.3	64.2	19.1	45.6	41.5	4.1
U.K.	90.4	79.9	10.5	56.9	54.2	2.7

Economically active person defined as one in a job, or seeking work, or temporarily sick.

Table 4: Industry of employment of usual residents (aged 16+)

Area	Agri	Energy/ Water	Manuf.	Const.	Dist. Catering	Trans.	Other Services
Cwmtref	0.0	18.5	27.0	7.9	15.9	5.3	25.1
Aberdare	0.5	13.3	28.4	6.9	16.4	4.1	29.6
Pontypridd	0.2	8.1	26.3	7.5	14.7	7.4	35.1
Tredegar	0.0	11.9	36.9	5.9	15.0	5.2	24.8
Fern/Maerdy	0.0	16.3	33.7	4.9	15.3	5.6	24.0
Gelligaer	0.7	14.5	27.8	5.9	14.8	4.8	30.3
Rhymney	0.0	15.0	35.0	6.2	12.7	4.2	25.8
M/Vale	0.0	23.9	31.0	7.0	16.2	7.7	13.4
U.K.	2.2	3.1	27.0	7.0	19.2	6.5	34.0

States percentage of employed residents working in the above industry of employment, based on a 10% sample.

(Both of the above tables compiled from the 1981 Census, Urban Area statistics, OPCS.

Abbreviations: Fern/Maerdy = Ferndale/Maerdy; M/Vale = Merthyr Vale.)

period. Many of the historical accounts quoted in chapter three suggest that the story of industrial Wales ended not long after the first world war, with the inter-war period providing a fitting coda. (e.g. Morgan and Thomas, 1984; Williams, 1985) As a result, towns like Cwmtref -and their churches and chapels- are hardly mentioned. This thesis offered the opportunity to redress that balance a little. At the same time the fact that I was born and raised in Aberfan, a village with a similar history to Cwmtref, reinforced its appeal as a research site.

My original criteria had been concerned mainly with the research topic and the need to marry high unemployment with a network of viable local churches. As for 'convenience' accessibility and some measure of physical and social compactness were indicated. I had however rejected the criterion of 'typicality'. There were, of course, many features of Cwmtref which could be identified as distinctively 'Valleys'. Yet, as the limited statistical data quoted in the above tables shows, the town had some characteristics which made it different to other settlements in the area, and to industrial South Wales as a whole. It resists the Valleys' stereotype in the structure of the population (low number of pensioners) and the pattern of employment, with only a minority of its workforce being employed in heavy industry or classed as unskilled.

There was, however, a more important reason why I felt 'typicality' was not an issue. By this stage in the search for a research site it had become clear that the chief requirement was not to place Cwmtref in the context of the South Wales Valleys, but to place the churches and chapels of Cwmtref in their local context. An approach which indicated that the wider social and

economic factors being assessed would be relevant only when and if they impinged on the relationship between church and community. Here, then, was evidence of the way the focus of the thesis had moved away from 'the community' in general terms, and toward a specific feature of local associational life. The immediate need was to assess Cwmtref more fully, and to begin compiling some preliminary data on its local churches and their links with local life. The time had come, therefore, to enter the field and test Cwmtref's suitability as a research site.

Cwmtref and its churches

The town of Cwmtref lies in one of those natural shallow bowls between steep hillsides which provided the space both for industrial development and the provision of public amenities. So even though the valley floor had been dominated by the colliery and its working for many years, room had been found for a winding, single-street, shopping centre, and also cinemas, churches, and the ubiquitous Miner's Institute (now a small factory). It meant, therefore, that the town had a recognisable centre; a commercial and industrial heart. Even now people talk about 'going into town', even though they may be walking just a few hundred yards from their home in one of the myriad of terraces fanned-out over the hillside.

Shopping and leisure have become the main activities to be catered for. Apart from the small factory mentioned earlier, there are no industrial or administrative units within Cwmtref itself. Nurses, factory hands, office workers are obliged to work outside the town, though for most it means just a mile or two to a nearby industrial estate or a small hospital.

Yet the fact that it has the widest range of shops, and has a modern leisure centre and other public facilities, means that

it has avoided the image of a 'ghost town'; a label attached to other settlements which have lost their industrial heart. Many of the respondents pointed-out that its dependence on the colliery had ended long before its eventual closure in 1978. Yet Cwmtref owes its existence to the development of the coal industry in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Before the Powell Duffryn company began mining the rich 'deep steam' coal below the Valley floor, Cwmtref was a small rural village providing homes for workers building the new railway and iron workers and coal miners who elected to commute each day.

Chapter three tells the story of the rapid urbanisation which followed the sinking of the colliery, and how the process differed from that experienced in the earlier industrial towns. One feature worth highlighting is the high level of non-Welsh immigration. The fact that Welsh speakers were soon in a minority is one reason for the wide range of religious organisations, still in evidence today. My preliminary fieldwork revealed that existing alongside the expected nonconformist chapels was a branch of the Salvation Army, another of the Pentecostal movement, and a parish church (Church in Wales). In fact, the Pentecostal Church had taken over a former Welsh language cause, while another former Welsh church was now a small workshop. This left one Welsh language cause, a Welsh Baptist Church which worshipped in English, and an English Methodist Society. These surviving churches were all viable and active. My task was to decide which, and how many, would be needed as a sample.

Ball(1984) admits that he made his choice of which school to study on the basis of 'minimal criteria' together with some subjective factors, such as accessibility, friendliness, and the level of cooperation. (p.75) My first concern, however, was to

establish how many churches should be included in a 'sample'. The first research design I had formulated had stated that the thesis would be based on a comparative case study. Now, that aim had to be incorporated into a modified research design. At first; it seemed that a broad range of churches from different traditions would be necessary, but then came a theoretical shift which led to a change in the type of methods to be used. This will be described in detail later in the chapter but, briefly summarised, it led to a move toward qualitative research methods and a form of ethnographic case studies. It seemed, therefore, that this would call for a smaller sample.

I decided that an 'in-depth' comparative study would need to be restricted to just two local churches. It was when the choice of churches had to be made that the subjective factors mentioned by Ball (ibid.) were influential. As a life-long Nonconformist I was wary of the other branches of the Christian Church. I also assumed that problems of access and cooperation were less likely if I worked with English Nonconformist churches. (My inability to speak Welsh precluded any consideration of Cwmtref's Welsh chapel.) Moreover, I could see a possible theoretical gain to be made from selecting two churches from the same Christian tradition. It would reduce the number of variables to be considered, while providing a sharper focus for the more subtle organisational differences. This insight came from what was in essence a second review of the literature, this time mainly in the sociology of organisations, which had reinforced my personal interest in the way churches are organised, and how their form of organisation affects the social relations of their members and leaders, and helps determine their policies and attitudes. If

these organisational factors were as important as now seemed likely, then a comparison between two churches whose main difference was organisational would be an advantage. I chose, therefore, Cwmtref's Methodist and Baptist Churches; two nonconformist churches with a similar theological and social heritage, but who had developed different politics and organisational structures.

Cwmtref, and its churches, had survived the test as a suitable and convenient research site. It was a physically compact area with a rich social life. The churches promised theoretical insights and the comfort of a familiar terrain. My home was just eight miles away, a fifteen minute car journey. The next task was to begin negotiating access to the two churches.

Access

As Burgess (1982:119) points out, the gaining of access is a process which continues throughout the fieldwork period. Even so, that first negotiated entry remains vital, and can have consequences for the research project as a whole. (Johnson, 1975) My basic strategy was to rely heavily on the 'chapel network' in a way similar to which Delamont (1984) used the 'old girl' network. (p.25) The fact that I was a product of the chapel, and was still capable of looking the part, lessened many of the anxieties about access and acceptance. Churches are, of course, public organisations with free entry to most of their activities. As a result, I was able to avoid making a formal approach to those in charge, thus avoiding the risk of them trying to curtail my movements. (cf. McNeill, 1985) Even so, it seemed politic to make myself known to the Baptist pastor, so I telephoned him on the pretext of needing some general information about the churches of Cwmtref.

This same excuse was used when I paid my first visit to the Baptist Church, for their coffee morning held on market day. I

literally walked in off the street and introduced myself to the two women in charge. This informal first meeting provided some preliminary data and, more importantly, allowed me to 'break the ice' before my first visit to a church service. I knew the problem of trying to break into the close family atmosphere found in so many Welsh chapels. As it was I had two 'sisters' who could introduce me.

I had to change my tactics for the Methodist Church. They had no informal public occasions, so I was forced to attend on a Sunday morning as a visiting worshipper. Once again my age, appearance, and familiarity with the form of service proved an advantage. There was some amusement about the fact that I regarded them as a suitable subject for research, but the way was smoothed by one of the members whose son was 'doing 'A' level sociology'. Though I did not realise it at the time, none of the leaders were present at that service, so I avoided being apprehended by those who 'try and take charge of the research'. (Johnson, 1975:123)

It was a few weeks later that I discovered how access problems may influence the collection of data. (Burgess, 1984b) The most glaring example concerned an interview planned with the secretary of the Baptist church. Like Buchanan (1988:61) I had a 'manager' (senior deacon) supervising the interview. While this destroyed the effectiveness of the interview it did give an insight into those particular social relations. All other 'interviews' with the secretary were in the form of unstructured, unplanned conversations. I was also refused access to the formal business meetings of both churches. All of the information on those events had to be gathered from key informants and leaked copies of the minutes.

This formal bar was more than compensated for by the ease of access to all other areas of the life of these two churches. Even the women's groups gave me an open invitation to their meetings. Ease of access posed its own problems. Some members became annoyed when I refused to take up their invitation to drop-in for a cup of tea. I suspect that this type of warmth and openness was characteristic of the people of Cwmtref. Even so the growing marginality of these churches appeared to work to my advantage. Their pleasure at receiving so much attention served to outweigh any suspicions they may have had about my motives and objectives.

Access was also made easier by my ability to fill any role they chose to cast me in. When the Baptist sisterhood wanted a speaker I obliged. When a former deacon wanted to argue for a more liberal theology, I was a willing listener. And, on most other occasions I could act as an ordinary, committed chapelgoer. In this way, at least, I was guilty of using the opportunistic approach advocated by Buchanan et al. (1983:54)

Making choices

The need to select a research setting and two research sites, and the problem of gaining access to each of these sites, was only part of the endless round of decisions to be made. I chose the two churches at a time when the actual research methods to be used had not been fully specified. One reason for this was that the research was going through one of those changes in direction and focus described by Ball (1984:74). When the churches were selected, the crucial theoretical question was the way the response of these churches was influenced

by external or environmental factors. I had not given up completely my ambition to mount a 'church and community' study. Initially, at least, the main methods of data collection would be quantitative, with the aim of assembling information about the number and extent of associational links between these churches and other local organisations, both religious and secular. The result would be a sequence of local network charts similar to those provided by Stacey et al in the first Banbury study (1960).

This line of enquiry came to something of a 'dead end'. (Ball, 1984:74) There were two reasons for this, both interconnected. One was a shift in the theoretical focus which called for a more intensive investigation of the churches themselves and their 'internal' structures, processes, and organisation. The second was the lack of data on which to build a 'church-community' thesis. It became increasingly clear that the amount of observable interaction between the churches, their members, and their immediate environment was extremely limited. Far too small, in fact, to justify the kind of comprehensive survey and questionnaire I had envisaged. These particular churches had no formal links with any local organisation except for the Free Church Council. The amount of individual associational activity was also low. The two churches provided eight members for the local branch of Toc H, the religious charitable organisation. Three Baptist members belonged to the Retired Schoolmasters' Association, and three to the Townswomens' Guild. Two from each church supported the Cwmtref Pensioners' Association, while two Methodist members were officers of a local hospital's League of Friends.

The theoretical shift was, in part, a response to the paucity of the data, but was also influenced by the literature and my awareness of the complexity of life within these individual churches. Thus, over a period of time, I came to realise that such factors as the type of polity and the social relations it produced, were of more interest, and of greater relevance, to this thesis than the links between these churches and the wider society. This did not mean that the idea of environmental influences could be abandoned, but it did suggest that these influences should be viewed from the inside looking-out as it were, rather than vice versa. That is the perspective and position to be adopted was that of a participant in the life of the individual church as opposed to an outside observer viewing events from a distance.

(cf. Crompton and Jones, 1988; Dempsey, 1964)

I was discovering that research was not a 'mechanical process'. (Burgess, 1984b:39) Changes were occurring and decisions emerging rather than being made. It is difficult to pinpoint the connection between theoretical shifts and the modification of the research design and the methods being used, even though they obviously do have some connection. When Dempsey (op.cit.) planned his investigation of local churches in Australia he found that 'I had to become a participant observer'. (p.60) No doubt I would have eventually fallen victim to the same imperative, but the truth was that I was employing the techniques of participant observation right from the start of the fieldwork. The notes made on my first fact-finding visit to Cwmtref Baptist Church, records not only the information

given by the two people I chatted to, but also descriptions of other visitors, of the building and its artefacts, and of the conversations I overheard, together with an analysis of the style of the social interaction observed.

This apparent disjunction between theory and method can be explained by my personal preference for qualitative methods and my previous experience as church administrator and community worker. (cf. Crompton and Jones, 1988:71) In more general terms it illustrates the dangers of being 'unselfconscious and non-reflexive' (Delamont, 1984:28) while engaged in the research process. Yet decisions have to be made almost on a daily basis, and often at times when the procedures and processes involved were not synchronised. The result was that a series of important choices, about the selection of events and activities to be observed, and of actors who could be regarded as key informants, were being made at the same time as theories and methods were being developed and refined.

Sampling of people and events

Ball (1984:75) notes that when studying complex organisations the researcher must sample whether aware of it or not. Burgess (1984a) underlines the importance of time sampling (p.58), a point taken up by Bryman (1988) who underlines the importance of timing research in order to capture a cycle of change. (p.20). In this study, it was the church calendar which was deemed important. I knew from experience that local church activity reaches a peak around the Christian festivals, particularly Christmas and Easter, while the summer and early autumn months

often brought a disjointed rhythm due to holidays and the absence of the minister for three or four Sundays. My time sample consisted of a period of sixteen months; June 1985 to October 1986. It could be claimed that this was a random sample rather than the result of 'the careful timing of research to capture a cycle of change'. (Bryman, 1988: 20). The choice of period was arbitrary seeing that it depended almost entirely on the timing of the postgraduate research programme, with the need to give ample time for both preparation and 'writing-up'.

The fact that I appeared to be in 'the right place at the right time' owes a lot to the element of good luck noted by Bresnen (1988:46), though it could be argued that it was the events of that particular time which helped to shape the research. After all, 1985 was the time of the miners' strike in which the churches took a controversial stance, and the project developed over a period in which there was a major debate about the socio-political role of the Church. Even so, it was 'lucky' that both of these individual churches were involved in crucial initiatives. The Baptists were trying to restore their fortunes with a major evangelistic campaign, while the Methodist society was seeking to guarantee the future of their building, Central Hall.

Hammersley (1985) suggests that one way of solving the vexed problem of which events to cover is to focus on a particular theoretical idea and, thus, those events that relate to that idea. (p.247) This can be an antidote to the novice researcher's desire to cover everything. At first glance, these churches provided less of a challenge than other

more complex and active organisations. They both had women's meetings, but on different days, and coffee mornings on different mornings. The Baptist Church also had a men's group, a mid-week Bible study, and an occasional House Fellowship. The only other mid-week activities were special meetings such as denominational rallies or Free Church services. My choice of which mid-week events to cover was often determined by what was practically possible than theoretically desirable. (Buchanan et al, 1988:53) The demands made by the interviewing schedule, the cost and time of travelling several times a week, and time-consuming tasks such as transcribing tapes, all had to be taken into account. But theoretical considerations also applied. Hence, the Baptist Men Group with its wide terms of reference, was deemed more important than the Bible study meetings which were used to explore in more detail the points made by the Pastor in his sermons. The main aim was to concentrate on any events which may be of direct relevance to the research topic while randomly sampling all of the other mid-week activities.

Sunday was the most difficult day due to the fact that both churches held services at the same time. I opted for a mechanical and random selection. If I attended the Methodist service in the morning I would go to the Baptist church in the evening. Once again, however, theoretical needs intruded. As the thesis developed, I found myself planning my visits extremely carefully so that I could be present at services which could yield relevant data. So, for example, Citizenship Sunday at the Baptist Church was given priority, as was the visit of the district chairman to the Methodist society. By the end of the official fieldwork period I had

attended over a hundred services - and heard over a hundred sermons. Over the same period I covered a minimum of two mid-week events each week.

It is possible, therefore, to establish some of the criteria used for the sampling of events, but what about the sampling of people and the selection of key informants? Ball(1984:78) found that his key informants were of 'considerable importance'. I would make the same claim. Lambert et al(1978) appear to have used their key informants as the means of finding out which were the most significant 'managers', and also to provide the information on which to base their 'more organised contact' with a [more] 'representative group'. (p.22) This suggests that key informants are not necessarily representative and may be chosen arbitrarily. I had this experience on my first field visit. One of the women who served me with coffee at the Baptist Church, became eventually one of my key informants. She was 'selected' on the grounds that she had been a member of the church for over forty years, was now a deaconess and therefore an 'insider', but also because she was friendly and forthcoming with information. To a large extent the choice of all the informants used in this study was made on the ability or otherwise to develop and maintain a productive researcher-informant relationship. (Spradley, 1979:46)

At the same time some of the pitfalls of this relationship became visible. Johnson(1975) came across informants who wanted to try and take charge of the research and to manipulate the researcher, while Barker(1984) split her Moonie informants into four categories including those

who attempted to use her as a means of pressuring their leaders.(p.21) I was not aware of this kind of overt manipulation, though I was the object of a kind of 'one-up-manship' among some of the Methodist members, with my key informants competing for my attention after Sunday services. I was more concerned with my manipulation of the informants than with the possibility that they may have been using me. The burden of, what seemed to me, quite intimate confessions of anger and disillusionment, and the exposing of deep-seated animosities between two parties with which I was attempting to build an open and trusting relationship, was often intolerable. It was of little consolation that these outpourings (mercifully few in number) had not been prompted directly by me. If nothing else, these episodes brought home to me the point demonstrated by Johnson(1975), that research involves a tension between 'gut feelings and rational thought'.(p.126)

As Bresnen(1988:46) points out, the status given by informants depends very much on the issue being explored, and their relation to it. My original aim was to keep a balance with informants being chosen to represent groups within the congregation (gender, age, etc.) with greatest emphasis being given to the mix of members and lay leaders. In the event, the need to investigate the arenas of leadership activity to which I had been denied access meant that more time and attention was given to those informants who were directly involved in the decision-making process. Even so, I did talk as frequently as possible to those on the fringe of church life, though not many of them were accorded a full-scale interview.

Collecting and recording the data

The increasing use of informants and the regular pattern of attendance at church services reflected the increasing reliance on the techniques of participant observation. I was, at the same, time collecting information on the way these churches were organised, and their environment. This entailed a lot of work with secondary material; church records of various kinds, denominational publications, and also personal interviews with people outside the research setting, such as denominational leaders. All of these enquiries were designed to provide a full description of these churches as organisations, yet I was mindful of Crompton and Jones's (1988:71) claim, that organisations cannot be studied at a distance. This reinforced my own desire to get beyond the church doors and to become involved in order that I could take a viewpoint which approximated to that of the man and woman in the pew.

It was this wish to adopt a specific position that resolved the question of what 'field role' I was going to adopt. (cf. Burgess, 1984a:80-5) Those who are actively involved with a local church inevitably find that their role can include both participation and fairly passive observation. For while worship is idealised as a participatory activity, this may not always be the case. It must also be remembered that most members are excluded from the processes of administration and 'production'. The fact that church members can be excluded from so many aspects of the church's life poses problem for the researcher who should recognise the need to be fully engaged in what Barker (1984) describes as 'passive, active, and interactive sequences'. (p.20)

This particular dilemma was never fully resolved. During services I attempted to be as passive as possible and to aim more for observation than participation. I sat at the back, wrote notes during Bible readings and prayers, but had to participate in the singing of hymns. After worship, however, it was necessary to become both active and interactive. Circulating and chatting, approaching people rather than waiting to be approached, picking-up leaflets, eavesdropping on conversations. So, while most of my fellow members sat in their pews waiting for one of the leaders to come and greet them, I was moving around with the deacons and stewards, and the book-collectors. This attempt to cover the gamut of field-roles while retaining my position as an 'ordinary member' was further undermined by the intrusion of elements of my personal biography. (cf. Burgess, 1984a:88)

The problem arose out of the self-disclosure involved in interviews as conversations. (cf. Burgess, 1984a; Buchanan et al, 1988) When 'trading' with informants, I revealed that I had once been a church secretary, deacon, and lay preacher. The result was a number of invitations to lead services at the Methodist Church and to speak to the Baptist women's and men's groups. In some ways this higher profile may have been an advantage seeing that most of my key informants were themselves church leaders. But it was bound to have some effect on my relations with the other respondents, though difficult to calculate. At the time I was frequently embarrassed by the ambiguities over my role. One example easily recalled was after a Sunday evening service at Central Hall. My first chat was with a lay preacher anxious to swap anecdotes.

I then moved to a group of women members who were just discussing the service itself. Finally, I was approached by a couple whose daughter was having problems with her 'A' level sociology course.

These after service chats were a rich source of material. Before I entered the field I envisaged data collection as a largely mechanical process, conducted in structured settings, and with the 'tools of the trade' (notebook and/or cassette-recorder) conspicuously displayed. But the notes I made after my first visit to the Baptist Church, and the clues they provided for further enquiries, made me realise with Crompton and Jones (1988:71) that all of the time spent in organisations should be regarded as part of the research. By that same token, 'trivial remarks and passing comments could lead to further insights and improved understanding'. Buchanan et al. (1988:59) As a consequence, I began to cultivate and develop those informal occasions. I took to wandering around Cwmtref on market day when I was almost certain to meet one or two of the church members. Then, on Sundays, I was the last to leave the building and made sure I walked along the street (often in the wrong direction) with some of my fellow worshippers.

Even though these occasions were adding to my stock of field notes, I did feel anxious about my possible neglect of 'proper' interviewing. I had, after all, spent a lot of time and effort compiling an interviewing schedule aimed at providing a balanced sample of each congregation, and I had produced several versions of a set and standardised questionnaire. But even though the questionnaire was never used, I did conduct interviews

which were loosely structured. That is, they were arranged formally, care was taken to delineate the roles of interviewer and interviewee, and the process of recording the information was made obvious. Furthermore, the questions were more detailed than the aide memoire used by other researchers. (e.g. Burgess, 1984a; 108; Bresnen, 1988:38) Typically, I would begin with a reminder about the project and an outline of the area of interest. Then I would open my notebook and turn on the tape-recorder. In most instances I attempted to follow the sequence of questions listed in advance, though allowing time for discussion and supplementary questions. I usually found, however, that as the interview developed it was becoming more and more difficult to follow the schedule and to restrict the natural flow of the conversation. These difficulties were increased when there was the inevitable interruption for tea and biscuits.

All of the respondents used in this study were subjected to this ordeal at some stage. Where key informants were concerned, however, I made more use of the unstructured interview or 'interview as conversation'. (Burgess, 1984a; 101-22) With most of them an 'interview' could be staged without notice and on any topic. Often, I would contact one of them just to follow-up a special issue or event. But no matter how informal the situation, I always made sure that my informants knew that I was recording their comments, particularly when they had said something which could be construed as controversial. My anxiety, about gathering information under false pretences led me to flourish a notebook as often as possible, and also to draw attention to the aims of my project at each interview.

The ubiquitous notebook was a useful trademark but did not necessarily solve the problem of recording interviews. Even the semi-structured interviews, when the notebook and the tape-recorder were used, posed the practical problems of placing the recorder in the best position, changing tapes half-way through a session, knowing whether to pause it or not when the interview was interrupted (some interruptions could have been significant). These difficulties were amplified a hundred-fold when it came to Sunday services. Moore (1977) seemed pleased with his efforts to record church meetings at Sparkbrook. But I was inhibited by my bid to be one of the worshippers and the distraction of writing in the ultra-reverent atmosphere of the Nonconformist chapel. Because of these concerns I used a small note-book which more or less fitted the palm of my hand, and made headline jottings at times when I thought the other worshippers would not notice. These often cryptic messages were expanded in the car before driving home, then written-up as full-scale field notes when I arrived home.

Much of the information included on those field notes was similar to that recorded by Moore (ibid.); the number and age [of worshippers]... significant spatial groupings, main points of prayers, sermons, and the hymns sung. (p. 99) I added the details of the announcements, the Bible readings, and the linking remarks made by the minister, and other observations such as the attitude to visitors, who did the various 'jobs' such as taking the collection, and so on. My notes on the after-service events would be added together with any general comments or analytical thoughts that may have struck me at the time.

Like other researchers I became aware of the vast amount of time involved with transcribing taped interviews (e.g. Barker, 1984; Hammersely, 1984). Unscheduled interviews posed bigger problems simply because it was difficult to make notes. I developed the practice of returning to my car or slipping-in to the public library in order to record the information at the earliest possible moment. The fact that 'for everything that is written down a multitude of other things are forgotten' (Ball, 1984:78) cannot be disputed, but it is difficult to think of a comprehensive and failsafe recording technique which would not destroy the 'permissive atmosphere' of field research. (Buchanan et al, 1988:61)

Analysis and theory

Unlike Delamont (1984:27) I had attempted to index my field notes right from the beginning. The 'scheme' used was rudimentary to say the least; in most instances it consisted of margin comments or categories written in red on the notes themselves. Originally, it was intended as a labour-saving device, allowing relevant data to be selected more easily and quickly. While this was regarded simply as a technical task it soon became obvious that it was intricately linked to the process of data analysis and the generation and development of theory. (See Burgess, 1985, pp 4-6) Many of the 'labels' used on those field notes referred to concepts and hypotheses arising out of the work done on designing the research, and formulating the research problem. At the same time, the notes often suggested new categories, concepts, and hypotheses and so changed and developed both the range of analysis and the theoretical focus.

This process appears to accord with the notion of 'grounded theory' as outlined by Glaser and Strauss(1967) and discussed in most if not all of the fieldwork manuals.(e.g.Burgess,1984a; 1984b;1985;Hammersely and Atkinson,1983) It did,however,cause a problem and pose a query.

The problem was small yet significant.Briefly,it concerned the categories and 'labels' used on my early field notes and the fact that these did not match those being used as a result of the thesis developing.While these signs of progress were encouraging and demonstrated how fruitful 'grounded' theory can be,it did cause difficulties at the writing-up stage.For when I made use of those early notes I either had to re-label them or run the risk of missing relevant data.In most instances I attempted to redefine the categories being used each time I worked with the notes.Even so,the possibility remains that where this was not done I may have been misled because the original cateories did not match the latest version of the thesis.

The query posed was to what extent the concepts I had developed were truly 'grounded'. Wood(1985:57) argues that the fashion for what he terms 'perpetual grounding' may be overdone and he calls for 'less fieldwork and more armchair reflection'.For my part,I was concerned not with the lack of 'armchair reflection' but with the fact that my theoretical insights could be grounded in the 'wrong' theory.That is,there was a possibility that when I was working with the raw data I was using analytical categories grounded not in the material collected for this project,but in that gathered over twenty years ago when I was so closely involved with the local church.Because of this anxiety,I attempted to retrieve and collate as much of that old data as possible. So minute books and other church documents were brought

out of store, and former colleagues were interviewed. When this early data was used I drew special attention to it and made sure that it was validated by sources other than my memory.

The fact that data analysis is often intertwined with the collection of data (cf. Burgess, 1982:198) means that the researcher has to draw on theoretical concepts which were formulated during the earlier stages of the research process, or even before. Many of those original theoretical insights and concerns have remained central to this thesis despite the theoretical shift hinted at previously. Nevertheless, I found like Hammersley (1984:60) that it took time for an 'overarching' theme or model to emerge. I also found, like others, that some of the trails I wanted to follow were false and that some of the material I had collected was largely irrelevant. (e.g. Ball, 1984; Hammersley, 1984; Newby, 1977) As a result of these experiences in the field two major theoretical adjustments can be highlighted.

The first was the realisation that the local church could not be regarded as a 'black box', or as an organisation merely reacting to its environment. Hence the 're-positioning' of the research to a place inside the churches and the detailed examination of their individual activities and structures. Yet this particular 'shift' did not produce the kind of coherent and forceful theme or framework advocated by Hammersley (1984). This was provided, eventually, by the literature. Fairly late in the fieldwork, I had turned to the body of work on ethnographic studies of schools (see Burgess, 1984a and 1985). Many of the research accounts in that literature (some

quoted in this chapter) helped me articulate and shape my theoretical concerns, while also leading me to reflect on my methods and motives. The second 'shift' into organisational theory came through the sociology of organisations literature and the advice of colleagues. Here, late in the day, was the theoretical framework searched for; one that encompassed my interests and gave this thesis the essential coherence and analytical focus.

Ethical concerns

Sellitz et al (1976) give an indication of the range of ethical problems facing those engaged in fieldwork. These, they suggest, can range from coercion of respondents to eavesdropping. (pp. 202-224) My own ethical worries involved two broad areas of the fieldwork. One related to the persona I adopted, the second to the level of subterfuge involved in collecting data in a variety of social settings.

On the first issue I felt with Johnson (1975:95) that I was presenting an 'idealised self' both as a means of gaining access, and as a justification for my continued presence in the research setting. The part I played during this research was one I had spent much of my life rehearsing for. To some extent, it was easier and more natural to play the Welsh nonconformist chapelgoer than that of a social science researcher. This posed a dilemma in that while recognising the need to 'be one of them' (Wax, 1978:262), I also wanted to make them aware of my role as a researcher in order to reduce the continual self-accusations of being deceitful.

Moreover, I became increasingly aware that I was no longer 'one of them'. My close involvement with the local

church had ended over a decade before the start of this project. For part of that time I had been away from Wales and had found different interests, even a different mode of dress. Now I was swapping my sweatshirt and 'cords' for the shirt, tie and grey suit of the middle-aged chapelgoer. While being aware that many researchers have to use similar ploys (e.g. Delamont, 1984; Newby, 1977, Whyte, 1955), I still felt uneasy about the fact that informants were giving me information and being involved in a relationship which had rather shaky foundations. Anxiety about this situation was intensified due to the fact that most of the interviews were conducted in respondents' homes.

This concern about the ethics of deceiving the subjects of the research extended to some of the methods used to collect the data. Like Hammersely (1984) I was concerned about the ethics of secret note-taking (p. 54) and, like Burgess (1984a), I worried about gathering data in social situations without giving indication of doing so. (p. 199) This was one reason why I chose to carry my shorthand notebook even on those occasions when I thought it might not be needed. It is doubtful whether this provided the safeguard intended. Most chapelgoers carry something; a Bible or a hymn-book, or an order of service. It certainly did not inhibit all those who enjoyed an after-the-service gossip. I was continually surprised by the free-exchange of opinions (and scandal) which was allowed to take place in front of 'a stranger'.

Towards the end of the field research I began to forget my notebook. On one occasion I had to go back to my car to fetch it because an informant wanted to give me some

statistical information. But even when I had it with me and the interview was on a semi-formal basis, there came the inevitable 'tea-break' when the tape-recorder would be switched-off, but my mental recording mechanism would be as active as ever. Inevitably, then, there was a lot of information received without it being recorded in any overt manner. I did, however, seek to protect my informants as much as possible. If they said something which I regarded as indiscreet I would point-out that it was being noted, and would seek to return to it later in the interview in case they wanted to withdraw it. One of the older respondents became adept at playing this game. She would say something when the tape was rolling then laugh and say 'I should not have said that'. But whenever I suggested omitting it from the transcript she would say 'Well it is the truth, and I'm too old to worry about what people would think'.

There was one further action needed to safeguard the subjects of this research. Along with Delamont (1984:30), I was anxious to use pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the churches and their members. But, like her, I wanted to use official documents which if properly referenced would immediately expose those I was trying to protect. In this instance, Cwmtref Baptist Church had two official histories, one written by a former minister, the other by one of the deacons. When referred to in the text I have used the correct name of the authors -both common names in the Valleys area- but have omitted the full reference from the bibliography.

3: The historical environment: Cwmtref, the Valleys, and 'Welsh Nonconformity'.

The growth and decline of nonconformity in the Valleys of South-east Wales (as conventionally told) has a seductive symmetry. A typical account would begin with the establishment of the traditions of dissent and puritanism in the seventeenth century. (Davies, 1981:20) We are then reminded about the effect of the Methodist revival during the eighteenth century which brought the number of dissenters in the area to an estimated fifteen per cent of the population. (Williams, 1980:24) But it is the nineteenth century which is given the greatest amount of attention. One historian suggests that around the time of the census in 1851 approximately three-quarters of the population were 'involved with the chapels', the majority 'living under chapel conditions', others reacting to those conditions. (Williams, 1985:206) For the next sixty or seventy years the power of the chapels was such that the nonconformist way of life was synonymous with the 'Welsh way of life'. (Morgan and Thomas, 1984:163) There is some dispute as to why this period of nonconformist domination came to an end, but most agree that it was effectively over by the end of the first world war and the early 1920's. (Davies, 1981; Jones, 1982; Macintyre, 1980; Morgan, 1981; Morgan and Thomas, 1981; Williams, 1985)

The driving force behind the spread of nonconformity during the nineteenth century was a combination of the traditions of puritanism and the social, political and economic changes of the time. (Davies, 1981:19) In the Valleys, it marched in concert with the spread of the iron industry and the urbanisation of large areas. The settlements that were formed as a result of these movements brought together people from many parts of the world, but they were led by Welsh speaking immigrants from Mid and North Wales. It was their influence that enabled nonconformity to fill the social vacuum and provide a 'chapel vestry culture, monochrome and nonconformist, but popular and working-class'. (Davies, 1975:106)

'Popular' nonconformity, in this sense, was a victim of the social changes of the mid-nineteenth century. A second phase of industrialisation, based on land-sale coal, brought a further wave of immigration, much more anglicised than the first. It also saw the emergence of 'the clerisy', a new and powerful social group made-up of teachers, preachers, shopkeepers

and lawyers. They have been accused of using the nonconformist movement to aid their bid to become a specifically Welsh middle class, exerting their political influence through the Liberal Party. (Smith, 1980:218; Williams, 1985:197)

The changes in the character of nonconformity which took place during the nineteenth century underlines the need to challenge the conventional histories. A point further emphasised when Cwmtref and its churches is placed on this broad historical canvas. For Cwmtref was out of step with that sequence of historical events. Even in the seventeenth century its potential as a centre for Puritanism and dissent was ignored, despite the development of nearby Gelligaer and the building of a huge chapel at Cefn Hengoed. (The Gelligaer Story, 1975)

In a similar way, Cwmtref continued to be insulated from the developments of the early nineteenth century. While other settlements expanded to meet the needs of the iron industry, Cwmtref remained a rural hamlet. At one time there was a nine-mile chain of iron-works stretched across the heads of the valleys. (Williams, 1977:187) Nonconformity was following the line of that development. At its peak a new independent chapel was being opened every five weeks while Merthyr, a typical iron-town, had twelve chapels compared to one Anglican church. (Morgan and Thomas, 1984: 160; Williams, 1977:249) Cwmtref's entry on this stage was due initially to the development of the railways. It provided homes for railway workers and for those iron and coal workers willing to commute. To meet their religious needs a Welsh language chapel was built as early as 1870.

Yet it can be argued that the events which were to influence the Cwmtref story most were occurring elsewhere. Indeed, much of it had been prompted by national, even international, developments such as the increasing reliance on steam power. This led to the discovery of the rich seams of steam coal lying below the Valleys' floor. Thus it was that areas such as the Rhondda were christened 'the black Klondike'. One writer describes the transformation thus: 'The sylvan, sparsely populated district was transformed into the most intensely mined area in Great Britain'. (Lewis, 1980:22)

Those who found such rich resources in the Rhondda soon began to explore other areas. So it was that the newly formed Powell Duffryn Company arrived at Cwmtref in the early 1860's in order to mine the rich steam coal seam which lay 1.875 feet below the valley floor. The project called for some of the most modern and expensive equipment then available, and the result was a showpiece colliery which attracted visitors from all over the world. An indication of the company's success in this venture was the record set by the colliers of Cwmtref in 1909 of the most coal raised in a single shift. (Williams, 1981:4)

Not everyone shared the company's enthusiasm for this 'flagship' project. One local writer noted that its much vaunted facilities did not include a pit-head baths or an efficient accident unit for the workers. During his adolescence, it was Cwmtref colliery which provided the image behind the phrase, 'the ugly face of capitalism'. (Williams, 1981:42) Certainly, the colliery site dominated the landscape. Alongside the tall winding-gear was a plethora of other buildings including a washery, coke ovens and a plant producing by-products of coal such as sulphuric acid and sulphate of ammonia. (The Gelligaer Story, 1975) It was because these workings took so much space on the valley floor that most of the houses and some of the later public buildings, such as Central Hall, were built on the slopes of the hillside.

Despite the evident drawbacks of such a major industrial development, Cwmtref had gained from the experience of other Valleys settlements. It also avoided some of the excessive paternalism of many of the earlier coal barons. It was one of these, Thomas Powell, whose name was being carried by the Powell Duffryn Company. Powell himself had died in 1864 and the company formed to take over his assets. The nine original stockholders included 'three eminent mining engineers and six others (including the father of Beatrice Webb)', and they were all English. By 1875 the company was claiming an annual output of one million tons from its Valleys' mines. (Morris and Williams, 1958:159-62) The fact that the company had a number of interests spread over the region reduced the chance of Cwmtref becoming a company town as places like Merthyr had been under the Crawshay dynasty. Moreover, the commuters mentioned previously ensured the presence of some inhabitants who were not totally dependent on the company and its colliery.

Those directly employed by the company benefited from fairly recent changes in work-practices. The truck system had been outlawed and there had been a general improvement in pay, hours, and social conditions. (Morris and Williams, 1958:209-47) Moreover, their relationship with their employers had been modified with the advent of the limited company. They now had to contend with a variety of 'bosses' ranging from the powerful company agent and colliery manager to minor officials such as overmen and firemen. Many of the top bosses had been brought into the area, but those who supervised the workers on a daily basis tended to be local (though not always Welsh).

As far as more general social conditions were concerned, these new settlements were no longer the raw 'frontier' towns that had been spawned by the iron industry. In the opinion of one historian, towns like Cwmtref were developing at a time when 'there were enhanced opportunities for inhabitants to shape their own lives and to create communities more agreeable to their own aspirations'. (Jones, 1975:57) This was illustrated by the increase in privately owned housing and in the leisure cum educational facilities such as the Miners' Institutes. There was also fresh opportunity for workers to become involved with politics through the infant Labour Party. Above all there was the improvement in the standards of provision of public health and education which coincided with the decline of laissez-faire attitudes 'that had gone beyond the merely economic and commercial, but extended to the uttermost relations in society'. (Jones, 1975:57)

While accepting the evidence for these major changes, care has to be taken when matching them to Cwmtref's specific history. The people of this new settlement may have witnessed the end of many of the influences that had shaped Valleys society during the first period of industrialisation, but they still experienced them. For the town's main period of development (1860-1920) ran parallel to the period when the 'Liberal Party/Nonconformist nexus [was] structuring popular culture and political thought'. (Jones, *idem*.) This indicates how this historical boundary was a feature of Cwmtref's story, and suggests that it could have been influenced by two distinct epochs; one underlining the power of the chapels, the other marking their decline; one proclaiming the power of middle-class liberalism, the other heralding working-class socialism.

The chapels, in particular, found themselves out of step with the more general pattern of growth and decline in the Valleys. At the time when attendances at Sunday worship in towns like Pontypridd and Merthyr were at their peak, Cwmtref Baptist Church was still in an embryonic form with a small group holding meetings in a local hotel. (Jones, 1985:138) Yet, while the chapels in these older settlements were heading for their sharp inter-war decline, Cwmtref Baptists were recording their largest increase in a single year -159 new members in 1924. (Davies, 1980:62)

Their experience also differed in more qualitative terms. While the iron towns had been cosmopolitan to a large degree their chapels had been aggressively Welsh, both in language and style. But towns like Cwmtref, born out of the coal trade, were subject to the wholesale anglicization which took place at the turn of the century. Much of this was due to the influx of English immigrants. During the period 1901 to 1911 the number of English immigrants outstripped the Welsh by a ratio of two to one. (Jones, 1969:121) This was reflected in the Cwmtref area in the returns for the census of 1911 which revealed that the previous decade had seen a hundred per cent increase in the number of inhabitants unable to speak Welsh. One of the lasting impressions of this anglicization is provided by so many unusual surnames -Blackmore, Caisley, Hollow, Pound, Riden, Bronham, Grundy, Pirrett- lending colour to the more typical profusion of Joneses, Williamses, and Evanses.

The onset of these far-reaching changes at a crucial time in the growth of the congregations being investigated poses obvious problems. Is it possible, for example, to judge whether these congregations were influenced more by traditional 'Welsh' nonconformity than by the modified version being presented through the medium of English? One thing that is clear is that the answer to such questions can only be provided at the level of the single congregation. As the following summary will illustrate the effects of these broad socio-cultural changes on the two congregations had both significant differences and similarities.

Cwmtref Baptist Church

This Baptist congregation is very much the product of its peculiar historical circumstances. It is possible to detect in its story

vestiges of the heyday of Welsh Nonconformity but also the move by the nonconformist movement to accommodate the social and cultural changes that were taking place. The most obvious difference between this church and the Baptist cause established two decades earlier was the language. Caersalem was a Welsh church which showed little concern for the growing number of non-Welsh speakers among the population. It was the failure of existing churches to adapt to these new demands that led a group of English speaking Baptists to found a nomadic congregation which held meetings in the houses of prospective members or borrowed other chapel buildings. (Jones, 1985: 138) While some local churches rejected -and feared- the forces of anglicization, the Baptist Union of Wales was quick to recognise, to react, and to form an English wing. The county association gave Cwmtref's English-language pioneers their support and allowed Principal Edwards to preach on the Foundation Day services held on November 6, 1896. (Jones, 1985: 138) Given this prompt support by the denomination the statement of commitment by their first minister sounds a little out of place:

There are no rules to follow and no history
to live by. We have to shape our own mould
and run our own course. Some men live by
the sweat of their brain and some by the
sweat of their brow and some by the sweat
of their hearts. The last will be our sweat
so let us labour on...

(Address at opening of the church's
first building in Jones, 1985: 139)

The sentiments may have seemed courageous yet did not reflect the true position. The preacher -the Reverend Harri Edwards- was a respected and recognised Baptist Minister. Listening to him were representatives of the Monmouthshire Association of the Baptist Union, and the founder members included those brought-up according to the traditions of the Welsh Baptist Church and Welsh Nonconformity in general. In fact, this church with 'no rules' had applied to the Association for membership and was set to inherit both a set of rules and a well-tried 'mould'.

These misgivings probably reflected some deep cultural ambivalence. Then (as now) there was a great deal of controversy about the future of the Welsh language, and the role of the chapels in preserving it. (Jones, 1980) This could explain the decision to join the Welsh rather than 'British' Baptist Union.

Whatever the reasons for that decision it did have some far-reaching implications. It meant that this congregation was committed to two closely related, yet separate traditions. The one was 'Welsh Nonconformity' with its strong links with Welsh culture and Liberal politics. The other, an anglicized form of nonconformity which, for all its strong Welsh roots, was more open to the wider Baptist community. Of those twin legacies Cwmtref appeared to lay more store by those practices and attitudes which came from Welsh nonconformity. Like the phrase itself, this notion of 'Welshness' is often difficult to define precisely. It is, perhaps, more obvious to someone more used to 'English nonconformity'. During this research I accompanied a leader of Cwmtref Methodist Society to a special service at the Baptist Church, and she confirmed my own impressions of being in familiar surroundings and yet having the instinctive feeling that things 'weren't quite normal'.

Some of the differences articulated by the respondent were rather subtle. There was the basic seriousness underlying all that was done, the willingness to express emotion, and the way extempore prayers were shaped by rhythms and idioms which echoed the 'hwyl' of the Welsh-speaker. There were also marked physical differences between this church and the Methodist's Central Hall. One which fascinated my companion was the 'set fawr'; a semi-circle of expensive wooden armchairs placed on a low platform under the elevated pulpit and reserved for the church leaders and visiting dignitaries. The size of the building - two stories each accommodating 1,000 people - owed much to the optimism and ambition of the Welsh language denominations which had survived until the end of the nineteenth century, if not much longer. Its layout - fixed hardwood pews, a gallery encompassing three sides, was typical of most Welsh nonconformist building, as was the attempt to embellish both outside and inside with some slightly baroque touches.

This congregation also clung to forms of worship and policies which had their origins both in Welsh nonconformist traditions and in the 'restrictive practices' of conservative Baptists. Hence the reluctance to allow the 'unbaptized' (adults who had not been immersed) to partake of the bread and wine and communion services, and the 'second meeting', for members only, after the Sunday evening service when the virtues of sermon and preacher were extolled. And when

'calling' a minister, the 'call' was usually given to a man, born in Wales, and having an impeccable Baptist pedigree. On the one occasion when this line of succession was broken and a young Englishman recruited the church experienced rare problems. This evidence of the 'Welshness' of Cwmtref Baptist Church is reinforced when its history is compared to that of Central Hall, Cwmtref.

The Methodist Society at Central Hall

As far as Cwmtref's Methodists were concerned there was never any of the cultural confusion found among their Baptist counterparts. English Methodists had no links with the Welsh language Calvinist Methodists who were an important force in the Welsh nonconformist movement. Indeed, the Wesleyan Methodists who were eventually to inhabit Central Hall kept clear boundaries between themselves and all other nonconformist causes, including the Primitive Methodist society which had been formed at Cwmtref in the nineteenth century. This, therefore, was a bid by immigrants to Cwmtref to worship in their own tongue and follow the traditions of their own particular branch of Methodism.

Even so, not all of them were English. One of the respondents, daughter of one of the early members, said her parents came from an English Methodist Society in one of the iron towns and before that a society in mid-Wales. But the prime movers were from the West Country. The one pioneer to be commemorated by a framed photograph hung on one of the walls was named Dorsett and came, it seems, from the county of Dorset.

The society's first home was 'the lesser hall'; a basic version of the church hall often appended to anglican churches. The contrast with the Baptist Church is stark. In fact, the Baptist vestry and side-rooms are better-appointed than lesser hall. It bears little sign of the care and reverence bestowed by the Baptists on their sanctuary. The outside is made of craggy, undressed stone. The polished 'closed' pews of many nonconformist churches have been exchanged for long wooden benches; the ornate and gilded pulpit for a bare platform. The leaders, it appears, took their place with the rest of the congregation.

The early history of these churches show a marked difference in objectives. In general terms, Cwmtref Baptist Church was

largely concerned with their own needs while the Methodists were concerned about the needs of the people of Cwmtref. So, in the 1920's the Baptist congregation was preoccupied with recruitment and paying-off their debts while the Methodists were selling one-penny scent cards to finance a tennis court for the unemployed. These differences became even more obvious in the 1930's. The Baptists continued with their programme of evangelical missions and special services, but the Methodists were preparing to meet the challenge of Central Hall, and the vision that lay behind it.

The Central Hall programme was a response by the Methodist Church to unemployment and associated social problems arising from the inter-war economic depression. Money for the scheme came from J. Arthur Rank, film mogul and lay preacher. The aim was to provide religious and social facilities for depressed urban areas. In Cwmtref's case, the hall that was built was the same size as the main building of the Baptist chapel (seating 999) but much different in style. The interior was very much like the 1930's cinemas, also built by Rank. The auditorium was semi-circular and raked, with rows of tip-up seats that focused on a large stage. Around the main auditorium was a series of ante-rooms, of varying sizes, including a kitchen. Obviously, the aim was to provide a versatile social amenity which could be used for Sunday worship, for major cultural events, or for a number of different social and cultural activities taking place at the same time. The decision to site a hall in Cwmtref (only the second in the Valleys) was due as much to its geographical position as the town's social and economic problems. By this time Cwmtref had grown to become the largest town in the Valley, due mainly to its central position which made it an ideal site for leisure and business amenities.

The inter-war period

The story of Central Hall draws attention to the possible parallels between economic depression and unemployment in the early 1980's and that experienced in the inter-war period. Many of the respondents were involved with the church during that period. Even those who were too young to experience it at first hand recognised that it was an important chapter in the story of both congregations. For the Baptists it was a time of growth and the beginning of decline, though the church remained strong. Many of the Methodists regard it as the true start to their history as indicated by the

universal adoption of 'Central Hall' as the accepted form of address for the society.

It was possible to some extent to make the connection between the experiences of these churches during the inter-war period and the attitudes and policies of the present membership. Certainly, most of the Methodist respondents told the story of Central Hall's role in the 1930's with a great deal of pride. When the Baptist respondents were asked about the same period they were often defensive. One deacon attempted to dismiss the question by saying 'of course we had our soup kitchens'. Be that as it may, neither of the official church histories mention this provision. They contain just two references to that era. One reports that 1922 was the only year in which the church failed to recruit new members. (Edwards, 1942:72) The other also concerns recruitment, though this time attention is drawn to 1924, the year when the church achieved its largest ever influx of new members. (Davies, 1980:62)

One possible explanation of this rather glaring oversight is that at the time the denomination was acting as the mediator of the socio-economic environment, and was able to impose its own priorities on the affiliated congregations. But it has been pointed out that the Baptist Union had failed to find a unified voice on social and political issues. Indeed, there was a fierce debate which threatened to split the Union. On one side were those who distrusted socialism and the Labour Party, and thought its principles incompatible with the Baptist faith. On the other were those who wanted the Union to participate in the fight for social and industrial reforms such as compensation for sick workers or an eight-hour day. (Bassett, 1977;371-3) It is possible, therefore, that the congregation at Cwmtref took a strong anti-socialist line and so avoided anything except a minimal intervention in social affairs. The present members deny this, and even if it was true it still seems odd that both of the official histories should virtually by-pass this period.

Another possible reason concerns the experiences of those individual members who lived through the inter-war years. Only one of those interviewed admitted suffering the type of hardship chronicled in the literature. (e.g. Men at Work, 1936, Orwell, 1980; Wilkinson, 1939) She recalled the trial of the means test when her

father who was a skilled worker had been laid-off because of a hand injury:

Because my family was so poor I left the grammar school and went to work with Williams the Chemist. My first pay was 7/6d per week [37½p]. When I arrived home after my first day's work my father was in tears. I hated to see men crying. I said, "Dadda, whatever is the matter?". He told me that he had reported my new job to the means test and they had deducted 6/- [30p] from his money. We were just 1/6d [7½p] better-off.

The pastor started his own career at around this time, but his memories were dominated by his progress in the retail trade and the events of the second world war, rather than personal hardship. Of the other lay leaders, one was living away from Cwmtref another was in her teens and just entering the family business, two of the older men had entered the teaching profession, while the senior deacon was succeeding his father at the head of another small local business.

This image of comparative prosperity is one that can be applied to the congregation as a whole. As Pope (1942) observes the building often reflects the prestige and well-being of the organisation's members and leaders. In this case there is a degree of opulence; a large pipe-organ, solid oak communion table and lectern, even a discrete stained-glass window. Perhaps such a well-appointed 'home' was essential for a church with a high reputation and a leadership made-up of 'schoolmasters, managers, and local business people of various kinds'. (Jones, 1985:175)

The overwhelming impression, therefore, of the Baptist Congregation during the inter-war period is of a concerned and worthy group who were not ideally suited for the kind of robust intervention that the social problems of the day required. They may have been further inhibited by the diminution of the socio-cultural role of chapels in general. In the three decades since the foundation of Cwmtref Baptist Church there had been a marked separation of religious and secular local organisations. Many saw the chapels as direct competitors with Miner's Institutes,

workingmen's clubs, cinemas, and dance-halls. The Baptist Union of Wales took the trouble to formally oppose the provision of workingmen's clubs 'despite their growing social and political significance'. (Jones, 1985:290)

Many of the concerns which dominated the inter-war period were still in evidence. One example was the great effort expended to maintain the chapel building and to preserve its function as a sanctuary and place of worship. One deaconess complained about the use of guitars during services, 'they don't belong in chapel'. Care was also taken to preserve the distinction between the lay leaders and other members. The phrases 'men of God' and 'house of God' gave the clue to a view of the local church which, in its fundamentals, had changed little since the cause was established. It was underpinned by a set of theological assumptions about the need to keep the Church separate from 'the world'. One expression of that perspective was the divide between the Baptist congregation and the secular organisations and activities of Cwmtref.

The Methodist society shared the same broad socio-economic and historical environment but received a different variety of inputs. Once again, the building provides a useful illustration. When Central Hall was erected it marked a radical departure from the style and purpose of nonconformist chapels in the South Wales area. As a result, it posed both a threat and a challenge to the view of the relationship between church and community held by conventional churches like Cwmtref Baptists. This being the case, why were Cwmtref Methodists willing to accept such a different approach?

According to Gwyther (1980), the answer to that question can be found in a change in the Methodist Church's theological outlook. He suggests that there was a move toward a 'social philosophy' which was 'carried on a tide of enlarged social thought and responsibility'. (pp.37-8) In Cwmtref's case, their attempt to aid the unemployed in the 1920's indicates some empathy with this type of religious philosophy. It could also be argued that an alternative approach was difficult for them given their isolation from other local nonconformist causes. Pietistic 'Welshness' was rejected in favour of 'English' Methodism.

Any lingering reservations about Central Hall and the demands it placed on the society's members were quickly dispelled by the charismatic Leon Atkin. He performed the difficult feat of filling the Hall with worshippers on a Sunday while making it available to the unemployed and others with social needs through the week. One of the members described Atkin's preaching style as 'modern', using the pulpit to make gentle fun of new fashions such as concertina stockings and bright lipstick.

Here then was double proof of a local church which was willing -eager even- to venture into 'the world'. There was little sign of the determined exclusivity practised by the Baptists. It is difficult to relate that bold and dynamic example of social intervention to the timid and defensive aura surrounding the present society. Even so, the heritage has not been dissipated totally. The present policy of letting the hall to local organisations and for public events is maintained partly because of financial necessity. But the principle that the Hall is a community facility and the society merely its stewards is still supported. The minister suggested that Central Hall and its message of social intervention 'is the reason why we [the society] are here'.

This preliminary outline of the historical environment of these two churches introduces and illustrates some of the main themes of this thesis. It shows how two groups who shared the same socio-economic environment received and processed a different range of 'inputs'. One explanation for this variation can be explored through the notion of mediation. In this instance the outputs from the wider environment were mediated first by the respective denominations. The Methodist Church provided the most effective 'mediation service' in that the promotion of a social philosophy was virtually enforced by the 'gift' of a social facility. By comparison, the Baptist Union's screening and mediation process was weak. They allowed through a number of mixed, and often contradictory, outputs.

In both cases; however, a second level of mediation can be observed. The Methodist Society may not have been in the position to refuse Central Hall but there was no way of ensuring that the scheme would work. It needed, therefore, the endorsement and enthusiastic support of the minister and the

leaders and members of the society. This, in turn, called for the screening out of alternative influences such as that of the more conservative elements of the Methodist Church.

The Baptist pastor and his lay leaders had a more obvious mediation function. In theory at least, they could choose to receive the separatist religiosity which characterised much of the Welsh Baptist movement, or opt for the political radicalism of those Baptist leaders who were actively involved with the Labour Party. (Bassett, 1977)

But even when the mediation process was used to its full effect, the inputs received from the environment were still subject to the internal processes of each organisation. There is not enough historical evidence to allow a detailed exploration of these processes, but there are clear indications that the key factors identified in this thesis were having a crucial effect on the response of these two churches to the social issues of the day. At this stage it is sufficient to give just a few examples.

Perhaps the most obvious is the effect of the difference between the internal politics of the two churches. The internal structure of the Baptist Church gave authority to its deacons, power to its pastor, and a measure of autonomy to the church as a whole. Methodist lay leaders, however, were in a much weaker position vis-a-vis the minister, as was the society to the denomination. Arising out of these administrative and constitutional arrangements comes further support for the view that the response of Cwmtref Methodists during the inter-war period owed much to the power wielded by the minister and the authority of the denomination. In a similar way we gain a deeper insight into the ability of the Baptist deacons to impose their particular model of the local church while preserving their own social and religious status.

This chapter has had two main aims. The first was to provide the historical context which is an essential and integral part of this study. The second was to take the first tentative steps in the process of relating the broad analytical framework to the substantive material available. Both of these objectives will be carried over to the remainder of this thesis. The analysis will become more detailed and specific while, at the same time, elaborating certain selected aspects of

the historical environment. Thus, in the next chapter there will be a full exploration of the denominations, both as mediators of the wider environment, but also as the most significant element of what I have called the religious environment of these two congregations. This, of necessity, will include a much fuller picture of the historical development of each of these local churches.

4: The influence of the denominations

While summarising the previous chapter, it was noted that the theoretical framework being used in this study can lead to the denominations being placed in two distinct positions when related to their member congregations. This is especially true when the framework is applied to the question of to what extent do the denominations influence the response of their member churches to the issue of unemployment.

This apparent ambiguity surrounding the role of the denominations arises out of open systems theory. One of the basic tenets of this theory concerns the relationship between an organisation and its environment which calls for some sort of boundary to be identified in order to differentiate between 'the system' (or organisation) and its environment. (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:63) Furthermore, the theory also embraces the notion of transactions across this boundary and the question of how they are regulated. (Rudge, 1969:230) I would argue, then, that the denomination can be viewed both as part of the environment and as the regulator, or mediator, of transactions.

Many studies provide an image of the denomination as part of the environment due to it being separated from its member churches by a boundary or barrier. (cf. Norman, 1976; Harris, 1969; Rex and Moore, 1967; Clark, 1982) Where such a situation pertains, the congregation can 'choose' whether to accept or reject the denomination's output of policies and ideas. Even though the fracture in denominational-congregational relations highlighted in these studies is rarely fundamental or irreversible, it does enable local churches to act to some extent as independent and semi-autonomous organisations.

There are, however, equally strong reasons why the

denomination and the congregation should be regarded as parts of the same, integrated, organisational structure. One obvious illustration of this comes through the notion of denominational socialisation. (Ranson et al, 1977:10) In order to meet that objective, a denomination has to maintain some kind of authority and control over its member churches. (cf. Cantrell et al, 1983; Harrison, 1969; Houghland and Wood, 1979) But even when many of the objective indicators of denominational control are missing -as was the case with Cwmtref Baptist Church- it is still possible to envisage a binding relationship between congregation and denomination based on other factors. This hypothesis will be examined later in the chapter.

At this stage, however, there is need to be aware that where there is a strong element of integration between denomination and congregation, the second role referred to comes into play; that of a mediator of environmental outputs. It is this latter role which the denominations appear to have elected to play. Some indication of the emphasis they place on their responsibility to mediate between local congregations and the wider social and political environment can be found in the extensive denominational machinery which enables committees, departments, and working parties to produce reports, arrange conferences, and publish a wide range of material. As the two denominational periodicals monitored for this study showed, there are few current issues which are not commented-on, either by the Methodist Church or the Baptist Union.

The fact that both denominations seek to mediate the environment for their member churches does not mean that they can no longer be categorised as part of that environment. In other words, the key question remains: were either -or both- of

these churches in the position of being able to reject the denomination's role as mediator and so treat its output in the same selective fashion displayed in regard to other environmental outputs. It is tempting to pre-judge this issue on the basis of the different denominational polities. Thus, it could be assumed that the 'autocratic' (Wilson, 1982) and 'unitive' (Cantrell et al, 1983) Methodist polity suggests an overt mediation role for the denomination, while the 'federative' Baptist structure (Cantrell et al, 1983) indicates that the Baptist Union may be seen by its member churches more as part of their environment.

But while these differences in the formal structures will be fully taken into account, there is need to go further and to look at the other ties which bind congregation to denomination. This will entail, of necessity, a detailed exploration of the work of both denominations and of their links to the particular congregations featured in this study. While this draws on more general observations of the denominational-congregation relationship, it should be noted that this research deals with two specific (and often peculiar) cases, and is concerned primarily with the response to unemployment and other socio-political questions.

Cwmtref Baptist Church and the Baptist Union

In 1986 the elected vice-president of the Baptist Union of Wales resigned before taking office. This decision was forced upon him because he had moved to a congregation which was not affiliated to the Union. Even so, he was still the minister of a Baptist congregation, and had not left the South-east Wales

area. The problem arose simply because his new congregation belonged to the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, rather than the Baptist Union of Wales. It is also worth noting that the office to which he had been elected was the vice-presidency of the English wing of the Welsh Union.

Cwmtref Baptist Church provides another example of those complex intra-denominational ties. Its main affiliation is to the Baptist Union of Wales. Yet, some of its auxiliary groups, such as the 'Men's Own', are linked directly to the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland. One way of coming to terms with these complications is to trace them back to their origins in the nineteenth century.

For over two-hundred years the Baptist Church in Wales was a pillar of Welsh language nonconformity. It was the scale of English immigration, noted in chapter three, together with the decline of the Welsh language, which brought a severe modification of this uniform denominational structure. When new congregations were founded in order to meet the demand for worship in English they were able to choose to belong either to the 'National' (U.K.) Baptist Union, or to the English wing of the Baptist Union of Wales. Cwmtref's founder members elected to join the latter.

It may seem irrational for an English congregation to decide to join a denomination which was still dominated by the Welsh language churches. At the time, however, the local Welsh Association (then Monmouthshire, now Gwent) were actively seeking to accommodate the needs of those who could not speak Welsh. In 1860 the Association had agreed that,

Churches having many English people
in their midst should be recommended
to establish English causes...
(Jones, 1985: 101)

Unfortunately, Caersalem, Cwmtref's Welsh Baptist Church, chose to ignore that injunction, forcing English speakers to found a new cause. Even so, the new church responded to the overtures from the Welsh Association. Within three months of its first meeting, this breakaway cause had been recognised and blessed by the denomination, despite the fact that at the time they were still gathering in hired rooms. (Jones, 1985:139)

Membership of an established denominational organisation provided some obvious benefits. The Association was able to guide the new church through the 'doctrinal sandbanks' by providing the basis for a covenant and a catechism. It was also able to advise on questions of church discipline and order. Furthermore, the Association could act as arbitrator when problems arose with other congregations, or between pastor and congregation. (Poaching, both of pastors and members, was a common complaint.) Then, when the church decided to call its first pastor, it could choose from candidates who had all been selected and then trained for the ministry by the Association. Once this training was complete, they were ordained by the Association (in the name of God) thus, in effect, giving their 'seal of approval'. Cwmtref Baptist Church were also given an Association loan to finance the building of their first chapel. (Jones, 1985:330)

While these denominational resources were welcomed, there was concern over possible breaches of the fundamental principle of the autonomy and authority of the individual congregation. As far as the Association was concerned, 'it could never impose or dictate, it could only advise, clarify and help. (idem.) That basic principle remains in place at the heart of the current constitution of the Baptist Union of Wales:

11.1. That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed by the Holy Scriptures, and that each church has liberty under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to interpret and administer His laws.

11.3. ...to cultivate Christian love and cooperation between the churches, Associations and all other institutions comprised by the Union, respecting the independence of every church in matters pertaining to its own government and discipline.

Yet, even while these principles were being codified, the denomination was 'erecting machinery for closer control' [of its member churches]. (Jones, 1985:330) These mechanisms included quarterly meetings, annual conferences, a proliferation of committees and sub-committees, all bound by 'the exact rules of procedure which formalised and institutionalised the links between church and denomination'. (idem.) The administrative structure was also being developed. By the first world war, the Union had a permanent office at Swansea, and was employing a full-time staff with the responsibility of serving the Union's Central Council and a number of sub-committees. This was followed by the recognition of the strength of the English wing which led to there being two Councils and two assemblies and conferences, though served by the same staff and facilities. (Bassett, 1977:352-61)

This centralisation programme was a response to accusations that the Union lacked power and was 'no more than a forum for discussions and making representations'. (ibid.:353) But giving the Union more power meant taking some away from the County Associations. Now it was the Union that took responsibility for the selection, training, and supervision of ministerial candidates. It also sought to formalise the business of providing financial aid for its member congregations by

way of a corporation with a legal entitlement to provide loans. When some congregations found their economic situation untenable the Union effectively took over their buildings by becoming the appointed trustees.

The Union's Annual Report for 1985-86 gave some idea of how these powers are exercised. One congregation had withdrawn from the Union during the year. The Assembly was told that it had 'a form of government that was unsatisfactory'. (p.7) Then it was reported that two probationary ministers had been asked to terminate their ministries while the five churches who had not paid their Union dues since 1982 had been warned: 'if they do not respond to further appeals their case will be put before the Council'. (Minutes and Reports of 1985 English Assembly, pp. 25-6

In the light of such vigilance, and the increasing number of congregations seeking financial aid, the principle of local autonomy was becoming difficult to sustain. Another example concerns my own church at Aberfan. It has received grant aid from the U.K. Baptist Union for many years. This aid comes in the form of a package deal, part of which involves an annual visit [inspection] from officers of the Union's Home Missions Fund. The reaction to this visit suggests that it is far more than an administrative formality. A three-line whip is imposed on all members, reinforced by public entreaties from the pastor for ALL members to be present [thereby setting a precedent]. This exhortation is accompanied by a testimony to the Union's generosity, and the difficulty of maintaining 'the church's witness' [and paying the pastor] without Union aid.

I had some personal knowledge of the type of relationship that exists between congregation and denomination when finance

was the dominant factor. During the period when I was secretary of Hope Chapel, all the ministerial help we received was heavily subsidised by the denomination. I noted at the time, how this increased the congregations sense of obligation. While such aid was being given we supported denominational initiatives of all kinds, including special rallies and conferences; a costly gesture given that they were all held in the Midlands or the North. We also increased our contributions to the denomination and responded with alacrity to special appeals. Our young people were sent to denominational youth camps, denominational leaders were invited to speak at our special services, an agent was appointed to sell the denominational magazine and other publications. There was, therefore, a concerted attempt to show that we were worthy of their support, despite the fact that we were geographically isolated and that most of the ministers we were sent were either playing out the days before their retirement or were probationers fresh from training college.

It is clear, therefore, that economic ties can be extremely powerful and can undermine the notion of local autonomy. Does this mean that the reverse situation applies? Cwmtref Baptist Church was economically independent, but did this result in an attenuation of the denomination's influence and a concurrent increase in the congregation's strength and autonomy? At a superficial level, the answer to that question must be yes. But the evidence detailed below also shows the complexity of their relationship, and the impossibility of analysing it in simple 'cash nexus' terms.

Though the congregation at Cwmtref took a long time to repay the original loan for the building of the chapel, they

have been financially independent for over fifty years. That is they both maintain the building and pay the pastor's stipend out of their own funds. One immediate advantage of this situation is that they are able to 'call' a pastor and have his full-time attention; there is no question of sharing him with another congregation. It also increases their freedom of choice. Pastors are recruited in a 'free market' which results in a 'natural' tendency for the limited numbers of pastors available being matched with the wealthier and more prestigious congregations. At least, this is the implication in the Union's complaint that 'It is those churches that are most enervated that lack ministerial help'. (Annual Report, 1984-5:28.) Indeed, some Union leaders would favour a more rational and equitable deployment of their ministers. The President of the 1986 Welsh Assembly made a plea for those ministers able to speak Welsh to be employed as district association secretaries with others being 'deployed strategically'. (The Messenger, October 1986.) Until such changes are made, congregations like Cwmtref will continue to underline their autonomy by calling a pastor of their choice, regardless of whether or not he is already serving another congregation, and without any official reference or approval from the Union.

Cwmtref's pastor told me the story of his call. At the time he was the part-time pastor of a neighbouring congregation. He had visited Cwmtref as a guest preacher during a period when they were without ministerial help. This was followed by another invitation where he preached a 'trial sermon', which was assessed by the church officers. On the strength of those performances, coupled with some discreet enquiries about other areas of his

work, the recruitment process was begun. The church secretary was instructed to initiate some tentative negotiations, but at some stage the 'call' would have to receive the full support of the congregation. At the same time the candidate was aware that he would have to face giving in his notice to his present congregation. But it was only when agreement had been reached between the pastor and Cwmtref's officers that the members of both congregations became involved. (Which does not mean they were unaware of these events.) Cwmtref's congregation was given the chance to hear a further 'trial sermon'. Having found this (third) performance satisfactory, the Church Meeting then passed the decision to issue a 'call' which the pastor was required to accept in writing.

That procedure seems to underline the autonomy of the congregation at Cwmtref. No mention was made of the Union being involved, either in the original approach or the negotiations that followed. Mention was made of a denominational leader officiating at the induction of the new pastor, but this could be regarded as more of a traditional courtesy than a constitutional requirement. However, further interviews revealed some of the subtleties of the denomination-congregation relationship. All those involved tacitly acknowledged that there was an obligation to the Union. The church secretary pointed out that the Union was often consulted throughout such negotiations, either for their opinion on the qualities of the candidate or on the likely reaction of the congregation at the loosing end. Moreover, the Union's approval was far from a mere courtesy, it was regarded as essential, both by pastor and congregation.

As far as the pastor was concerned, this recognition was

the key to his position as a professional minister of the Christian church. For while 'maverick' pastors are sometimes called by congregations who, themselves, have broken-away from the denominational structure, those who want to work with the mainstream churches, or be accepted as a professional person by the world at large, need to carry a denominational label. Cwmtref's pastor was acutely aware of this. He was anxious to point-out that although he had not attended a theological training college he was entitled to refer to himself as reverend and was on the list of approved Baptist ministers. This meant he could be employed by any of the congregations affiliated to the denomination (in any part of the world) and was eligible for a non-pastoral post either with the denomination or some outside agency. At a more mundane level, but still important for this particular pastor, it gave him access to places and people who required the services of 'a parson'.

The individual congregation has not quite so much to gain from its links with the denomination. Many of the respondents, however, spoke with pride about the fact that they were Baptists, and not the members of one of the oddball sects such as the Mormons or the Jehovah's Witnesses. Being Baptists, as we noted earlier, gave them a pre-packed theology. In most instances they were content to rest on the doctrinal decisions made in the past, and seemed willing to let the Union deal with any current controversies. So, if required, they can adopt the denominational line on moral or social questions, and can become involved, by proxy, with such things as the ecumenical movement. Perhaps the biggest advantage, though less tangible than many others, is the mere fact that they 'belong' - belong to a major international denomination which is itself part of 'the Church Universal'.

The pastor often drew attention to this, particularly when the number of worshippers was small and morale appeared to be low.

Some respondents were also less than convinced by the objective evidence of their autonomy. Many expressed doubts about their ability to maintain their economic independence. They pointed to the slow but continued decline in the number of members and the difficulty of maintaining an ageing building. This was a fatal combination which could eventually lead to them asking the Union for help. Yet that consideration did not appear to do much for their present involvement with the Union. There was a marked absence of any routine physical links apart, that is, from those auxiliary organisations which act as local branches of national denominational organisations such as The Zennana, The Baptist Missionary Society, or the Baptist Men's Movement. The church as a whole, however, did not have any formal links of this type.

The evidence so far favours the notion of local autonomy. While recognising the presence of ties and obligations of various strengths, none of them can be seen as indicative of denominational control, or even undue influence. For while the congregation looks to the denomination for the recognition and legitimation of many of its activities, it can still claim considerable freedom both in doctrine and practice. One Baptist minister of vast experience said he marvelled at the range of theological positions taken by Baptist congregations, despite the denominations rather conservative image. As he pointed out, the principle of local autonomy is jealously guarded and when congregations do trespass beyond the broad boundaries set by the denomination, the range of direct sanctions available to the Union is extremely limited.

It is only when the congregation is economically dependent that Union power can be exercised in any kind of overt way. Yet, even in situations where there is a lack of formalised or institutionalised authority and control, it is still likely that some form of control can be applied though by other, informal or unofficial, means.

This was the point made by Harrison(1969) in his study of the Southern Baptist Churches of the U.S.A. He suggested that power was gained, by the denomination and its leaders, through the inter-group and inter-personal links made arising from their informal relationships.(p.440) But the evidence presented in this thesis, suggests that his observation does not apply to this particular case. There was, in fact, a notable lack of inter-personal links between the members and leaders of Cwmtref Baptist Church and the officers of the Baptist Union of Wales. It was a very small minority of church members who supported Union events, such as district rallies. Most of those who showed any knowledge or experience of the denomination's affairs belonged to the select handful of lay leaders who were chosen to represent Cwmtref at Union council meetings and assemblies. The fact that these representatives were always church officers owes more to an aspect of the organisational culture than to any codified procedure. Thus the secretary and treasurer attended the Union assembly, the secretary and another deacon attended the national conference of the Men's Movement. During the eighteen months of the field research the secretary went to two annual assemblies and one residential conference.

For those members of the congregation, like me, who were not involved directly with the Baptist Union, it was difficult

to find out much about its affairs; most of the information came from my efforts as a researcher. Publicity for the Union was restricted to announcements of District (Association) meetings. No mention was made of the Annual Assemblies either in the church notices or as a topic for prayer or comment during worship. I was unaware for a long time that the Association and the Union both had English magazines. I discovered this by accident when I found a back-copy of the Union's Messenger lying on a table. Some weeks later the pastor and secretary presented me with a copy of Gwent Welsh, the Association's journal. This gesture was made because they were excited by the re-issue of the journal which, they believed, was a great improvement on the original version. I decided not to tell them that I had already 'found' a copy of the first re-issue (November, 1985). This, it seems, had not impressed them quite so much.

I was not the only person to find difficulty in gathering information about the denomination. Most of the other members interviewed confessed that they did not read the Gwent Welsh, despite the publicity given to it by both the secretary and the pastor. This may have been due to a poor distribution service. A pile of copies was left on the vestibule table, but I was never lucky enough to see one being taken. Indeed, the pile did not seem to diminish at all, though it may have been replenished between Sunday services. But even if a member was a regular reader, he or she would have learned little about the work and policies of the Union. When the magazine was re-launched its first issue consisted mainly of feature articles. Among them was one entitled 'Should we have a confession of faith', then there were two meditations, a missionary letter, and an obituary. The possibility of it promoting the work of the Union more effectively

was negated by the dull format and the fact that it was not published at regular intervals.

The lack of enthusiasm for denominational affairs was underlined by two incidents. The first concerned the launch of the official history of the Gwent Baptist Association (Jones, 1985.). This is a well-researched book which gives a fascinating account of the struggle by the Association to reconcile the interests of its member churches -Welsh and English, rural and urban. The index has eleven references for Cwmtref Baptist Church and I found it invaluable in producing this thesis. It is also cheap, just £5 for almost four-hundred pages. Both the pastor and secretary promoted it with some vigour. It was advertised at both services on four successive Sundays and much was made of the attention it paid to Cwmtref. Yet when I enquired, just before the end of my field research, I was told that four copies had been sold; one to the pastor, one to the senior deacon, one to the secretary, and the fourth to me.

The second incident concerned a special pageant organised to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Association. Once again Cwmtref had been given a prominent role and the congregation had been asked to take part. The officers had also agreed that they would provide one of the venues for its performance. But, after much effort and an appeal to a special church meeting, Cwmtref was forced to withdraw because of lack of support from the members. In the end those who wanted to see the production had to travel to Newport: no one did.

The overall impression, therefore, was that Cwmtref Baptist Church was given -and enjoyed- a great deal of autonomy. This

view was strengthened by the application of a series of indicators provided by Cantrell et al(1983). They suggest that autonomy can be measured first of all on the grounds of legal status -does control of the property rest with the local church? Then on the question of deployment of the clergy -the degree to which the minister is an officer of the congregation or of the denomination. Finally, they ask about budgetary procedure -is the local congregation able to 'determine the allocation of its funds, set accounting procedures, withhold financial or demographic information?'. (pp.280-2)

Cwmtref Baptist Church scored well on these measures. Its building is managed by its own board of trustees. It manages its own financial affairs, and has far more control over the deployment of its pastor than does the denomination. Yet each of these 'freedoms' is either provisional or a 'gift' from the denomination. We already noted how perilous their oversight of the building could be. If there was a sudden drop in income or the trustees failed to maintain the building, the denomination would be called-in. And while the administrative and financial systems are seen as belonging to the congregation they are, of course, based on models provided by the denomination. Certainly, they are not bound to provide the Union with details of their internal affairs but few would argue that it is in the church's interest to withhold them unnecessarily. And though the pastor is in the (temporary) employment of the local congregation, he remains first and foremost a Baptist minister, and if there was a disagreement between the congregation and its pastor the denomination would be invited to arbitrate.

From the point of view of the congregation the question of their autonomy was far less straightforward than such objective measures may indicate. Their policy was to steer a middle-course between the extremes of unilateralism and dependence on the denomination. So there was a conscious attempt to maintain cordial relations with the Association and Union while, at the same time, giving their affairs a low priority. Despite the complexity of this relationship, there was no evidence of denominational control, either at the formal or informal level. But I would argue that the data outlined so far does indicate the strong possibility that the congregation was subjected to denominational influence. The congregation's, and pastor's, reliance on the recognition and legitimation of the denomination meant that the basic structures of the denomination-congregation relationship had to be maintained. Thus while the pastor and other agents may not have sought to strengthen this relationship neither did they actively seek to undermine it. So many of the mechanisms of denominational socialisation and influence were still in working order. That is the democratic procedures of being represented at Assemblies and conferences, providing statistics, receiving reports and other publications, and consulting the denomination on major decisions such as the calling of a new pastor, all survived. Thus, it can be seen that this congregation remained open to the influence of the denomination.

It is the notion of denominational influence that has to be addressed when the specific topic of the response to unemployment is considered. In order to do this there is need to shift the focus temporarily away from the congregation and toward the denomination. For while the strengths and weaknesses

of the local congregation may be the main determining factor of the question of denominational influence, they have to be assessed in relation to the ability of the denomination to exert such an influence. It is important to discover, therefore, just how strong is the denomination, and what are the dominant attitudes and policies which it would seek to impose on its member churches.

The polity of the Baptist Union of Wales is based on representative democracy and an 'open' constitution. It is a structure which has produced an imbalance in that the administration is controlled by a small number of individuals. Furthermore, decision-making is largely the province of the representatives and full-time officers who serve on the councils and their sub-committees, though their decisions are subject to the ratification of the Assemblies. This means that the Union can present views and policies that are seen to represent those of local congregations such as Cwmtref but which, in fact, may merely be the product of those individuals and churches who support the Union's work. Such a conclusion is borne out by the evidence found in the debate on unemployment where there was a marked difference between the response of Cwmtref Baptist Church and that of the Baptist Union. In order to underline that point, I will provide a brief outline of the position taken by the Union on unemployment and other socio-political issues.

Social issues

Like most other mainstream denominations, the Baptist Union of Wales has a special 'department' to deal with social and moral questions. In this case it comes in the form of the

Citizenship Committee, one of twelve sub-committees dealing with different aspects of the Union's work. Yet this particular sub-committee is not a standing department but may be formed by the Union's Council 'as may be thought necessary'.

(Constitution.V11.3(a).) When it is in being it is required to report its proceedings to the Council(s). (ibid.V11,3(d).)

During the church year 1985-6, the committee members were the Union's President, Vice-President, former President, plus two ministers and three lay members. All five of the elected members (ministers and lay) served as individuals rather than as representatives of a congregation or Association.

The committee did not meet at all during the year 1984-5. In his report to the English Assembly the secretary said that 'the mammoth effort made to respond to the Warnock Committee Enquiry on human fertilisation and embryology had caused exhaustion'. But he also had a complaint:

I confess I was irritated last year by comments from certain people, who do not show much inclination to shoulder the burdens of Union life and work, when they accused me of speaking in the name of the committee rather than in representation of them.

(Report of 1985 English Assembly, p.29.)

The secretary's irritation was increased when some representatives criticised the committee for its failure to meet and for not giving the Assembly a lead. This led to the demand that the Council should examine the procedures of the committee. (idem.)

In reply the secretary went on the offensive. He listed the wide range of issues the committee would have considered if it had met. His retrospective agenda included the miners'

strike and the [bad] behaviour of the police; the [detrimental] effects of the government's short-term economic policy; the Brussel's football tragedy; the Clive Ponting case and the questions it raised about the relationship between the civil service, the government, and the country; the many people out of work; the three-million children living in disadvantaged conditions; the starving of the world and 'our' food mountains...

Tell me this is politics if you will,
but I will tell you that the Bible calls
us to be the voice of those who have no
one to cry out for them... Have we the
courage to ruffle the respectable, to shake
up the comfortable, to lift up the fallen
and care for the helpless in an
age which cares less than it should...
(idem.)

If the committee had survived that ambitious agenda their findings would have been presented to the two Councils and, eventually, the English and Welsh Assemblies. Any resolutions they wanted to put forward needed the ratification of the Councils and could not be presented in the name of the committee. Once this procedure was completed, all the resolutions approved by the Assemblies would be sent to the appropriate authorities. In 1984 two were passed, one on world peace and nuclear weapons, the other on the imprisonment of Rudolf Hess. However, the committee had found itself another outlet. Reports of its deliberations appeared regularly in The Messenger, which was edited by the committee's secretary.

Unfortunately for the individual concerned, both of these jobs appeared to require an advanced defensive technique. In his report as Journal Editor he told the same assembly:

It has been political and economic
references that have caused the greatest

response...Some said it was an intrusion into areas that did not concern us, however, it struck me that they complained in much the same way that politicians do when church people speak of them. If they don't agree what is being said then it should not be said.

(ibid.:30.)

Another example of his technique appeared in The Messenger where he chose to print the comments of one of his opponents:

The Reverend J.O.G. Brown said that the Editor showed little editorial discretion, misused articles...so that many people no longer felt confident in sending items for publication, and there were often grammatic[sic] mistakes in things rewritten by the Editor. He added that he hoped the Editor would take the remarks personally.

(October, 1986.)

Despite such harsh judgements, the journal did contain comment on political, social and economic questions which did not come directly from the Editor's pen. For example, it was the Union's General Secretary who wrote, 'The Church must be the church in the world and to divorce one from the other is to negate the Gospel'. (November, 1985.) And one Reverend G. Ingrams commented:

The Baptist Church has always accepted that it has a national and parochial responsibility. We do get involved in the world of today and the bleeding of its heart in pain, poverty and hunger, and in its threat to blow the world to smithereens, and its dilemma over technology and unemployment.

(June, 1985.)

Similar sentiments were expressed in a report of the 1986 English Assembly:

The President urged that the Gospel must concern itself with the practical problems people face in this life. The Gospel speaks to the whole man. The whole welfare of man must, therefore, be our concern...Perhaps

we have been too willing to let the
Welfare State do our caring for us.
(Oct.1986.)

These concerns were not left completely to the ad hoc citizenship committee and a few articulate individuals. The Assemblies were given a number of opportunities to turn their attention to social and moral issues. In 1984, for example, attention was drawn to 'the context of the secular society within which the churches have to operate...'

Science and technology leaping ahead of
our legal and moral codes...drug abuse...
unemployment. It is the Levite and the
Priest who ignore the secular scene and
who go past on the other side. When the
church is irrelevant to the world she
is under the judgement of God.

(Annual Report, p.24.)

The same Assembly discussed the work of the Council of Churches for Wales, lending support to the initiative of its Church and Society department which had made unemployment a priority. (ibid.p.31.) It also decided that the Union should join CND Cymru[Wales].

In 1985 the Assemblies agreed to continue their support for Christian Heritage Wales, including its proposal to encourage community councils[parish councils] to initiate or support social projects. (Report.p.28.) Approval was once more given to the Council of Churches of Wales, this time for its involvement with the Christians Against Torture movement, and its proposed boycott of South African produce. On the same day a report was received from the Joint Consultative Committee of the Baptists in Britain which noted that the 'Valleys problem -churches facing a situation of dramatic and rapid social, industrial and economic change', had been brought to its attention. (ibid.:19)

Finally, it was resolved that the Union should take part in the British Council of Churches' exercise entitled 'Not strangers but pilgrims' which included a statement on the question of The Church and its social responsibility. (ibid.:21.)

Those items have been carefully culled from the Annual Reports for those two years. It would be wrong to suggest that they represent, even in a limited way, some kind of political programme, or even an agenda for social action. What they do reveal is a level of concern and interest in moral and social issues and the Union's assumption that they have the right to contribute. Nevertheless, in terms of time, effort and practical response, it was the Union's housekeeping problems that were at the forefront. Great concern was expressed about the dwindling congregations, the lack of recruits for the ministry, and the threat of insolvency facing many churches. And though they had debated the incidence of deprivation in the Valleys, financial aid and practical ventures were directed toward the missionary movement and Christian Aid. Though the reports did not record any outright opposition to the Union's political and social involvement one respondent pointed-out that those who were most critical of such ventures tended to ignore the Union and ally themselves to the evangelical movement.

It is clear, therefore, that the Union's involvement in this area was not universally welcomed, and it is also obvious that some of the opinions it expressed were not shared by all of its member congregations. Even so, the fact remains that the Union was committed to the principle that it 'should act on behalf of the churches in expressing social concern.' (Russell 1980:14) This commitment was formally expressed in the provision of a Citizenship Committee and, more consistently perhaps, in the

Union's willingness to support socio-political initiatives taken by other Church organisations. Many of the statements made by the officers and leaders of the Union underlined that commitment.

The Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland tends to give socio-political issues an even higher profile. Russell (1980) notes that it, 'advises churches on matters of social concern by taking action where it can on behalf of the denomination, and by providing opportunities for Baptists to become involved in specific social commitments' [through the Department of Mission]. (p.15) The promotion of intervention in 'matters of social concern' is also an objective of the weekly Baptist Times. One regular column deals with parliamentary affairs, while another is headed 'Cause for Concern'. Under this rubric can be found a wide range of topics: old age pensions (27.2.86); apartheid (17.4.86); more general racial discrimination (24.4.86); Baptist attitudes to the 'inner-city problem' (27.2.86). On May 8, 1986, the column returned to the subject of urban deprivation in order to claim that The Church is 'local and participatory' and should, therefore, be taking the lead in social action.

While this review of the denomination's output revealed a fairly consistent interest in social affairs, the same could not be said of Cwmtref Baptist Church. None of the topics mentioned above surfaced during the field-work period. Not even those involved with Union activities seemed aware of the debates, comments, and calls to action emanating from the denomination. Yet many of the questions being discussed were directly relevant to Cwmtref's own situation. After all, they were part of the 'Valleys' problem', considered by the Joint Consultative Committee. And though the local colliery was closed, it would be reasonable to expect that this erstwhile mining community congregation should have taken a stance on the miners' strike.

It is even more difficult to explain why there was no adverse reaction to some of the views coming from the denomination. After all, the pastor and lay leaders conveyed an air of religiosity which verged almost on disdain for the 'things of this world'. Services were Bible and Church centred; a position which often leads to the rejection of social and political intervention. Even so, there was no evidence of a critical response to liberal ideas, or to the Union for promoting them. In fact, a great deal of care was taken to draw attention to the need to support the Union, even though these pleas tended to be restrained and understated.

This seems, therefore, to be a case where the local church was able to reject the output of the denomination, and its role as mediator of the political and social environment. In doing this they, in effect, relegated the denomination to their environment rather than regard it as an integral part of the organisational structure. On these issues, at least, there appeared to be a clear demarcation line between the response of the local church and the Baptist Union(s) which, in turn, implies that this was a congregation with a high level of autonomy.

Yet it is difficult to sustain this picture of a largely independent congregation. Much of the data quoted in this chapter shows that, in most instances, the church-denomination relationship was cordial and had elements of interdependence. When viewed over the whole of the church's activities, this relationship was marked more by integration than separation. Could it be, therefore, that the failure to join the Union in its debate on social issues was a reflection of the topic rather than on the position of the two organisations?

It would be quite appropriate to treat this as a special, and unrepresentative, topic. As we have seen, the denomination, at all levels, had failed to provide a unequivocal line on the issues, while attempts to involve the individual congregations had been vigorous but far from coercive. The fact remains that social and political concerns came some way down the agenda which the denomination had set, and which continued to be

dominated by domestic problems such as finance and recruitment. Because of this comparatively low priority, churches were able to avoid the issues without fear of recrimination. It seems, then, that on this kind of issue, the denomination could be treated as part of the local church's environment, thus enabling each congregation to accept or reject these particular elements of the denomination's output.

What had happened in this case, however, was not an overt rejection of these issues. In fact, the question of whether or not the congregation should have been involved in social or political questions had never been openly discussed: it had been kept off the agenda. Gaining an insight into the processes and social relations surrounding the circumscribing of an agenda is a notoriously difficult exercise. Some analysts, such as Bachrach and Baratz (1963) and Crenson (1971), have advocated an approach based on the concept of non-decisions. But Parry and Morriss (1982) have suggested that it would be more profitable to consider how a series of minor decisions can constrain final choice. When their insight is applied it suggests that the debate on unemployment did not reach the agenda because it had been decided, over time, that the agenda should concern other matters and so preclude the inclusion of social or political issues. The prime example of this type of constraining decision was the one taken on the evangelical campaign. Once this was sanctioned almost all of the congregation's resources and energies were directed in this one direction. As a consequence the church focused less on the outside world and more on its own needs, which happened to coincide with the 'spiritual' needs of the people of Cwmtref.

A detailed analysis of the structures, processes, and actors involved in setting the agenda, and the more direct means of processing inputs, will appear in later chapters. But it is worthwhile noting here how one key actor - the pastor - was able to influence the programme adopted by the congregation.

He pointed out in one of his earlier interviews that planning was critical: 'Everything is organised, planned and processed. I don't believe in haphazard methods'. Because of this belief he planned his sermons months in advance and the content of mid-week meeting, Bible studies and house fellowships, was overseen by him. Underlying this approach was a concern to

'preach the Gospel', which made it necessary to guard against any material inconsistent with 'the Gospel'. He was clear about how 'the Gospel' should be defined; no more, no less than that found in 'the Word of God'. This, in turn, was defined as the Bible interpreted in fundamentalist, usually literal, terms.

One consequence of this particular perspective was that the work and worship of the congregation was not just centred on the Bible, but also on The Church, as opposed to The World. This stance is not necessarily consistent with his claim to be an 'evangelical'. As Lyon (1985) has noted, there are a number of strands within the conservative sector of the Christian Church but 'Bible literalists are often right wing'. (p.118) Indeed, in the USA they have been in the vanguard of the backlash against abortion, divorce, permissiveness, and women's liberation. (p.120) But the Revd Pryce seemed more preoccupied with the welfare of his congregation and rarely made any direct reference to the 'sins of the world'. Unlike many of the same persuasion, he was not given to cataloguing sins and drawing attention to those most virulent in contemporary society. For him, a general condemnation of 'sinful man(sic)' and the constant promotion of the 'good living Christian' was sufficient.

This omission was most noticeable when he was leading the congregation in prayer. Baptist churches tend to follow the tradition of extemporary prayers which gives the leader of worship a tremendous amount of leeway. Often, they degenerate into a 'shopping list' of thanks, petitions, and thinly-disguised complaints. The Baptist Times seeks to encourage a more cautious approach which also serves to publicise the Union. So each week they provide a list of prayer topics which invariably includes the needs of 'foreign' missions, or of named areas in this country where the denomination has a district association. The pastor of the Baptist church I attend uses this list and adds to it current events which have caught his attention - wars, famines, floods, or any other event which could be described as a disaster. The Revd Pryce, however, had just one list, the names of the church members who 'are in need of our special prayers', usually because of illness or bereavement. He also prayed for 'all those who are sick or sad, lonely or bereaved', without, it seems, having any particular individuals, groups, or

areas in mind. The bulk of his prayers (and sermons) were, however, concerned with aspects of the Christian life, the qualities of the Deity, and the need to appreciate His 'glorious' creation'.

This sweeping style allowed him to bypass current issues and also reduced the amount of publicity given to the work of the denomination. When interviewed on this topic he revealed a view of the Union which was both ambivalent and inconsistent. At one stage he stressed the close relationship between Cwmtref and the various levels of denominational organisation:

We have a close contact. Mr Davies [senior deacon] and me are on the Executive [of the Gwent Association] and I'm a past president. So I go to the ministerial sessions and other sessions when I can afford the time... We[I] also sit sometimes on the Citizen's Committee[sic]... Because we aren't grant aided we don't get official visits. But, of course, we participate in all that is necessary to participate in. We don't get many visiting speakers from the Association because I am here ninety-five per cent of the time and the sermons are planned in advance.

But in another interview he confessed:

The Association has a Citizenship Committee; mainly young people... To be quite honest we[I] never know when they are meeting and what they discuss... I am not involved. You have a certain amount of time and you have to give priority to your church and your home.

It was the second of those viewpoints which matched his behaviour during this research most closely. During this period, he missed the two annual Union Assemblies, electing to take his annual (spring) holiday instead. The only denominational activities he supported were Associational rallies and prayer meetings. His level of involvement contrasts sharply with the two other Baptist pastors interviewed for this project. Both of them were responsible for more than one congregation, yet one was a member of the national (U.K.) Home Missions Committee, and sat on the two joint consultative committees based in south Wales. The second pastor was secretary of his District Association, and a leading light in the Baptist Men's Movement.

While these pastors had a different view of the role of the Union than the Revd Pryce, it should also be noted that their perceptions and actions may have been affected by some important structural considerations. The most significant of these was the fact that these other pastors served congregations who were grant-aided by the Union. Not only does this make the congregations (and pastors) partly dependent on the denomination, it also removes the freedom to determine the allocation of funds and set accounting procedures; one of the indicators proposed by Cantrell et al (1983:282). Congregations in this position are obliged to allocate most of their funds to making good the shortfall on the pastor's salary and have to open their books to representatives of the denomination.

They also differed from the Revd Pryce in that he was much nearer official retirement age than they were, so more unlikely to seek a denominational appointment or want the Union's support if 'called' to another congregation. He had also missed out on the main avenue of denominational socialisation, a Baptist training college. Finally, his insistence that 'ninety-five per cent' of his time should be devoted to his own congregation made it difficult for him to cultivate those inter-personal relationships which are so important to loose structured organisations such as the Baptist Union. (Harrison, 1969)

Reasons can be found, therefore, for his rather erratic support of denominational ventures. But it is more difficult to explain why he refrained from criticising them; in public at least. After all, to borrow Norman's (1979) phrase, 'he subscribed to the notion that all earthly expectations are worthless and incapable of satisfaction'. (p.79) A view not supported by many of the Union's pronouncements. He also sided with those who regard salvation as a personal and spiritual matter implying, therefore, 'a division between the physical and spiritual, the church and the world, and between that which is sacred and that which is profane'. (Paget-Wilkes, 1981:127) This perspective has been contrasted with that of the 'radicals' who see 'salvation as being set free to be human, and to realise one's God-given potential. It means being free from injustice, oppression, and

deprivation'. (ibid.:129) Most of the Union's output reviewed here reflects that radical position, yet the pastor chose not to speak against it.

It is likely that he was inhibited by his own need to identify with the denomination and to maintain the legitimacy it gives to his position. Denominational labels do matter. They often ease relationships with non-churchgoers who recognise 'Baptists' as a group within the traditional church. They also provide the wearer with some standing within the church community, helping to distinguish him or her from adherents of the less acceptable religious groupings.

At the same time he had to be aware of the strong structural ties which still bound congregation and denomination together. For all the independence and freedom claimed by Cwmtref Baptist Church, the fact remained that they remained loyal to the polity and administrative procedures provided by the denomination, and were prone to regard other churchgoers who were not Baptists as somehow lacking in the true faith. But the continued existence of these ties did not enable the denomination to influence the policy and attitudes of the congregation, other than at a very general level. That is, the congregation was willing to maintain Baptist traditions but virtually ignored the Union's attempts to encourage debate which could lead to the modification of its own position. In observing this partial breakdown of denominational influence and control attention has been drawn to the way the congregation's own structure, and the power it gives to the pastor in particular, had brought about the rejection of a major part of the denomination's output.

Central Hall and the Methodist Church

Ranson et al (1977) describe the structure of the Methodist Church as a 'shallow hierarchy'. (p.15) Shallow it might be, but this is of little consolation to those local societies who form the base of that hierarchy. Above them lies the circuit, then the district (synod) and, finally, the legislative Methodist Conference. While the policies and practices of Methodism originate at the top of the structure, they are administered to, and imposed upon, the local society by the circuit and/or district.

As far as the Society is concerned it is the Circuit which carries out the function of denominational control. For many at Central Hall this control was immediate and oppressive. They suggested that the vicious circle of declining members and falling income made the Society dependent on the goodwill of the Circuit for its survival. This may suggest a lack of confidence in the carefully designed democratic structure of the Circuit which ensures representation for all member societies and also attempts to balance the role of professional versus lay leaders. Even so, the Circuit is characterised by the 'regimental democracy', and control by standard procedures and rules which are the hallmark of Methodism. (Ranson et al, 1977:152)

An incident from the history of Central Hall demonstrates the strength of this hierarchical structure. In the early 1960's Cwmtref still had two Methodist Societies - Primitive and Wesleyan - despite the proclamation of a united Methodist Church in 1932. Both societies had resisted the pressure on them to merge for over thirty years. Then, in the 1960's, the Wesleyans at Central Hall applied to the denomination for financial aid for the refurbishment of the building. The superintendent minister at the time was told aid would only be given if he succeeded in reconciling the two societies and a merger was accepted. He recalled the considerable bitterness and resentment this directive caused, particularly among the 'Prims' who were established before the Wesleyans but now had to close their own building in favour of Central Hall. Some members of the Primitives left Methodism altogether, or opted to avoid Central Hall and join societies in other areas. Despite the opposition, and the immediate losses, the merger was formalised in 1964, the Primitive Methodist building closed, and later demolished. The directive had come from the top of the denominational hierarchy, the Home Mission's Fund, but it was the Circuit, under the superintendent minister based at Central Hall, which was responsible for implementing the decision and overseeing the acrimonious negotiations.

A second example of how the Society is subject to the denomination is the economic relationship which exists between them. In 1986, Central Hall was required to pay the Circuit £38 per week, based per capita on the recorded membership of the

Society. In arriving at this figure no allowance had been made for the fact that some members may not give the Society the level of financial support it needs. This was the situation faced by Central Hall with its average weekly income of £30 per week. Making up the shortfall called for a lot of effort and some ingenuity. In the opinion of the property steward, the Circuit's demands were absolutely unrealistic. He painted the rather lurid picture of a struggling local society at the mercy of a relentless denominational machine which was saying 'pay up or we will close you down'. These words had actually been quoted by a former minister, though perhaps not as seriously as this particular steward interpreted them. Even so, the Circuit does have the power to close those societies who are no longer viable. Indeed, the Valleys of South Wales have become something of a graveyard for such lost causes, though their demise was due as much to suicide as fratricide.

While the steward's view of the Circuit's power may have been coloured by his responsibility for maintaining the property, many other respondents tended to grumble about the way they were being 'governed'. It was pointed out that they were one of the weaker societies yet expected to carry the exceptional load of Central Hall itself. On these grounds alone they deserved more help from the Circuit. The complaint was not new, nor was the imbalance between the societies -and circuits- within the South Wales District. It was the need to rationalise the area's resources, and so provide aid for societies with the greatest need, that led to a major re-organisation scheme and the formation of a super-circuit christened The Mid Glamorgan Mission.

The Mid Glamorgan Mission

Before reorganisation in 1977, Central Hall was one of ten societies which made up the Rhymney Valley Circuit. After 1977 they found that they were one of forty societies spread throughout South-east Wales and embraced by the title The Mid Glamorgan Mission. Those who had initiated the scheme saw it not just in terms of its administrative and financial benefits but also in the opportunity it provided to make 'the circuit' the coordinating and facilitating organisation that the Methodist

Church wanted. In common with other denominational structures, it had a number of objectives, but priority was given to helping the member societies, and to reversing the declining fortunes of English Methodism in the Valleys area.

Local societies were seen to benefit from this radical piece of centralisation in two ways. Their financial burden would ease as the contributions from the wealthier societies boosted the Circuit's funds. Secondly, they would gain from the pooling of skills as ministers and lay leaders amalgamated their resources in a team ministry. Care was taken not to remove pastoral care from the old pre-1977 circuits. Ministers would still have 'their own patch', but they would also be committed to the Mission and the societies outside their immediate area. The image envisaged by the designers of the scheme was that of a sort of ecclesiastical task-force; a special forces unit which could respond to the needs of individual societies, or invigorate ailing areas of the church's mission, such as youth work.

Central Hall, therefore, had hopes that the financial demands made on them would ease and that they could use one of the specialists on the team to re-open the youth club or the long defunct Sunday School. None of those interviewed thought that these hopes had been realised. Even the superintendent minister (now retired) who had been instrumental in inaugurating the reorganisation, agreed that the results to date had been disappointing. Yet he defended the concept behind 'The Mission' as 'the only hope for societies like Central Hall'. But what effect did these changes have on Central Hall's experience of denominational influence and control?

To a large degree. The Mission had little observable effect on Central Hall. True, some small gains could be claimed, but they still depended on their minister, shared now with nine other societies, and with The Mission and the ministerial team. Many respondents complained about this situation. They drew attention to the failure of the team to act as a task force, yet it had still reduced the time 'their' minister had for his own societies. As the team recorder (minute secretary) pointed-out, though team meetings were held just once a month they were lengthy affairs and demanded a large input from those involved. One

strategy often used was to ask one of the members to compile a discussion paper on his specialism which was then circulated to the other members. The compiling, the reading, and the debate on such papers was regarded by some as an unnecessary drain on their leaders' time and energies. The fact that, as the recorder pointed-out, these debates were lively and informative was of little consolation to those members of the local societies who saw their minister being given a heavier work-load while the amount and quality of ministerial service they were receiving deteriorated rather than improved.

The Mission has also brought a modification in the logistics of circuit activity. Before 1977 these activities were available to all members for the price of a short bus ride. Now the need to cater for such a widespread catchment area means that many people are asked to journey to what they regard as unexplored territories within the Valleys. One member of the team confessed that she still found difficulty in finding the manse of one of the ministers which was situated in a remote spot. Some respondents saw these drawbacks as a good reason for not supporting the Circuit more fully, and while the Mission has brought an increase in inter-society events the support they receive has tended to decrease. I attended a united missionary rally on a fine autumn evening. The chapel was comfortably full with over a hundred worshippers. But when this number was divided by the forty societies represented by The Mission, and it was noted that a 56-seater coach from the Rhymney Valley had carried just five passengers, the reluctance of the majority of members to become involved in such events was clearly evident.

The Mission also had to contend with the problem of recruiting ministers to the Valleys' area. Central Hall's minister said, 'Mid Glamorgan is regarded as one of the least attractive circuits in the country'. As a result, there was a constant struggle to replace those ministers who had completed their statutory three years and, it seems, left the area with some alacrity. This lack of continuity in the full-time leadership was one of the reasons given for the Mission's apparent failure. In a rather desperate effort to redress the situation, denominational ethics had been breached and ministerial vacancies advertised in The Methodist Recorder. During the period of the field research, the team lost and replaced three ministers, another two were 'working their notice'.

In this respect the society was having a similar experience to that of the 'Village Methodists' studied by Clark(1982). He noted that junior ministers fresh from college intensified the image of the minister as an uninformed outsider bringing unwelcomed change, and with a potential 'conflict of interests' with the local laity. (pp.79-81) Conflict certainly surfaced in this study, largely over the minister's neglect of his pastoral duties. This was summed-up in the refrain, 'he doesn't visit'. The Revd. Watson, in his defence, pointed-out that he was responsible for ten societies, and was committed to support the ministerial team and the Mid Glamorgan Mission. He was also expected to contribute to wider denominational activities. This left little time for any kind of comprehensive pastoral programme. One lay officer calculated that if a Methodist minister attended all the business meetings he or she was due to attend, and if those meetings were held as often as standing orders required, there would be the equivalent of two full-time ministers engaged with nothing else except committee work.

The consequence of this work-load for Central Hall was not just that the minister did not visit members' homes; they rarely saw him at Sunday services. According to the circuit preaching plan he is due at Cwmtref just two Sundays per month. This is supplemented by a monthly visit to the sisterhood. He is also required to preside over all the meetings of the Church Council, but they need only be held twice a year. The minister was worried by this situation:

I am greatly inhibited, not simply because the element of pastoral work is so small. Its not simply what we would call pastoral work, its lack of personal contact... I know very few of them [members] really well so I am thrown back on the basic

council procedure if I want to exert any influence.

His experience indicated that this lack of personal contact was greater in Cwmtref than in other societies. He had worked previously in large circuits, but had never felt the same degree of alienation between minister and members.

He had spent over forty years in the Methodist ministry and could see many changes taking place. In his opinion there was at the present a move toward devolution, and greater autonomy for the local society. This he regarded as a positive move. He claimed that many societies were being run almost on congregational lines. Central Hall, however, was not in the position to take advantage of such developments. Local autonomy requires a society with both resources and a strong leadership. Where this level of self-sufficiency exists, the society can carry-out many of the functions performed previously by the circuit. One respondent had belonged to a society in this position. It had an elaborate internal organisation with ten sub-committees each dealing with different aspects of the society's work, each of them led by a lay steward.

Central Hall, however, had no committees and just two stewards (a third was appointed during the field research). Because of the gaps in the organisational structure the society was run most 'unMethodically'. The most obvious example of this was the haphazard arrangements made to fill gaps in the preaching plan. On some occasions a member of the congregation was required to preach off-the-cuff. On two other occasions the organist and the pianist both accompanied the hymn singing and led the worship. Further confusion surrounded the contents of the

notices, who was going to read them, and who was going to take the collection.

These problems stemmed from the Methodist polity which was based on a high division of labour, with lay leaders being allocated specific areas of work. There was, therefore, no equivalent of the Baptist secretary or senior deacon who were in a position to take overall responsibility. Neither was there a group able to take collective responsibility, as demonstrated by the Baptist diaconate. Central Hall had to depend on individual stewards, each able to carry-out a specified range of tasks. If, however, there was a shortage of stewards, or if any of the office-holders were inefficient, the tendency was to leave the work undone.

This, it seems, is what had happened to the society's participation in denominational affairs. It was required to send an official representative to circuit meetings who would then complete the democratic process by reporting back to the Church Council. But the minute secretary related how she had attended a circuit meeting as an observer and found that Central Hall was not represented. When she enquired what had gone wrong she was told that the situation had existed for some time. So the basic democratic link had been broken and the hierarchical structure had developed a serious fault.

In these circumstances the responsibility for keeping the society-circuit relationship intact lay with the minister. In this particular case he was aided by an unofficial lay assistant. It was these two individuals alone who were involved with the different levels of the denominational structure and who were in the position to transmit and promote the policies

and attitudes of the denomination. It is necessary, therefore, to look briefly at their assessment of the Methodist Church, and particularly, its response to social issues.

The Methodist Church and 'social responsibility'

The lay assistant was in a rather ambiguous situation. His post had not been recognised by either the Circuit or the individual societies. Even so, he was an accredited lay preacher and the minister had conspired to give him partial oversight over the 'Hall' and another society in the same valley. There were signs of a move toward granting him some kind of official recognition, such as his appointment, near the end of this project, as editor of the Mid Glamorgan Mission's newsletter.

Whatever the weaknesses of his formal structural position, he was able to exert some influence at Central Hall. He was aided in this by the fact that he shared 'equal billing' with the minister, taking two services each month. He also involved himself in activities which were outside the minister's remit, such as the weekly coffee mornings. In general terms, therefore, he had a much higher level of informal contact with the members than did the minister. Another reason why his view of the Methodist Church was particularly instructive was that he had been brought-up in the congregational tradition. This had obviously coloured his opinion. He said that he found the Methodist preoccupation with rules and procedures 'almost frightening'. He told with some relish of his discovery of a special sub-committee which existed to appoint the district chairman. It so happens that each chairman serves ten years, yet the committee is re-elected annually, just in case the current chairman should suffer an early demise.

Time-wasting elections such as those, plus the vast number of set procedures and standing orders, made district meetings a 'most appalling bore...bringing all the representatives from the circuits together in one huge building where they sit and rubber-stamp a set of reports and elections'.

He was more than a little dismayed by some aspects of the denomination's response to social issues. His main complaint was about what he described as the 'ultra-liberal attitude' shown to moral issues such as abortion and homosexuality. But it is the stance taken rather than the principle of involvement which he found disagreeable. Indeed, he was full of praise for an initiative taken by a Rhondda Valley society which had formed a discussion group to 'discuss the reality the church meets today'. But generally speaking the response at local level was rather low-key. Special courses were available for preachers who were 'that way orientated'. There was a local representative of the denomination's Department of Social Responsibility, though he was not sure who it was. As far as The Mission was concerned, the work of this department tended to be treated as the 'poor relation'. In his previous circuit (South Glamorgan) there had been regular reports on its work and the newsletter was circulated to all the societies' representatives. Since arriving in Mid Glamorgan, three years ago, he had not seen the newsletter or heard any reports.

His own view on the denomination's response was formed on what he read in the weekly Methodist Recorder. But the minister reckoned that The Recorder had virtually no impact on local opinion because so few members read it. He had carried out his own survey of local newsagents and found that they had

three regular orders, one of which was his own. He believed that the Department of Social Responsibility received similar treatment. It was, he said, the least popular department of the Methodist Church:

The department itself recognises that it represents only a minority... Those who are keen are very keen, but it is difficult to find real enthusiasm in the church... there is a significant minority in the life of the church who are interested in such issues.

These views about the Division of Social Responsibility [official title] must be put into context. Though these leaders had reservations about its work, it did not mean that they belonged to the majority whom the minister regarded as less than keen. In fact, earlier in the interview, the minister had made a strong statement about the type of response Central Hall should have been making to social and political issues. After all, he argued, the Hall was purpose-built for a positive response to the social problems of the 1930's. The apathy of the present congregation could, therefore, be interpreted as 'denying the reason for its existence'. His lay assistant was also concerned about the local manifestations of these problems. At one stage in his career he was one of group of concerned academics working for a voluntary organisation formed to combat the socio-economic malaise of the Valleys.

If anything, their assessment of the denomination's involvement with socio-political issues was too conservative. While the Division of Social Responsibility may be regarded as the 'poor relation' by Methodist standards, when compared to the Baptist Union's citizenship committee it seemed

more like a rich uncle. It produces an impressive range of information and advice. The 1985 catalogue of 'resources' listed leaflets, study-packs, posters, conference reports and audio-visual aids. The topics covered included alcohol and drug abuse, smoking, animal welfare, family life, health and healing, sexuality, poverty, unemployment and work. In 1983 it produced a report on unemployment which stated,

Unemployment damages and diminishes people.
Disrupts personal relations, removes
people from some of the main arenas of
social interaction...deepens divisions
within society...(2.1:1.)

After hearing the report Conference resolved to,

Encourage the department[sic] to publish
it in a format suitable for study and
discussion and commends such a document
to the Districts, Circuits, and churches
for study and appropriate action.(idem.)

Even if local societies failed to respond to such directives, they should have been aware of the lively debate taking place within the denomination. This was given extensive coverage by The Methodist Recorder. Again this covered a range of social, political and moral issues. During 1985-86 I noted letters and articles on the inner-city problem and the report Faith in the City produced by the Church of England; a controversy that continued throughout the period. Other, short-lived, topics included video nasties(24.10.85.); the Anglo-Irish Agreement, third world poverty, Arthur Scargill and the aftermath of the miners' strike(12.12.85.); child care, the Public Order Bill ('Is Britain becoming a police state?')(12.12.86); British Leyland, Haiti, Northern Ireland(13.2.86.); Sizewell nuclear reactor, Soviet Union, mortgage debts(21.8.86). Of the first twelve issues monitored there was just one leading article on the Methodist

Church itself, and that looked at the difference in its attitude to the inner-city question compared with that of the Anglican Church.

The letters page carried comments on all of these topics but took some of them a stage further than the leader writers. One of the more enlivened debates was started by a reader who asserted that 'middle-class, wealthy, comfortable individuals and churches do not care about the problems of the poor and disadvantaged'. (Nov.-Dec. 1985.) The middle-class readers hit back with a broadside against the 'claptrap of sociology' which they suggested was influencing these left-wing views. (19.12.86.) They then went on the offensive with a series of letters in support of Mrs Thatcher and her policies.

The Recorder, therefore, reflected the varying attitudes to socio-political issues within the Methodist Church. The paper itself achieved a degree of balance by devoting large amounts of space to 'religious' matters: news of expanding societies, sample sermons, Bible-studies and meditations. One omission, however, was of any direct criticism of the denomination's concern and involvement with secular issues. It was left to one solitary correspondent to express forcibly reservations about the 'social gospel' that were implied by other writers:

The time has come to make a spiritual u-turn and put the Gospel of Jesus Christ in its proper place and once again offer people not political solutions but the living Lord who can change the hearts of men and women and establish His Kingdom in their lives.

(Letter. 12.12.85.)

Most of the preachers who served Central Hall had already made the u-turn requested. The issues debated in The Recorder

were rarely mentioned from the pulpit. They were ignored not just by the 'local arrangements' from other congregations but also by Methodist ministers and accredited lay preachers. One of the ministers concerned suggested that it was the Society itself which should be blamed:

The church has become an old age pensioner's club. How can you preach a social gospel to OAP's?...The church, with its aged membership has turned in on itself...There is no debate at local level...there is an acquiescence.

While that statement may be regarded as 'fair comment' it does not provide a full explanation of the lack of response to the promptings of the denomination on social issues. One of the areas it overlooks is the subject of this thesis; the organisational factors. It is when these are brought into focus that we become aware of how the relationship between the denomination and the Society at Cwmtref had been modified due to a virtual breakdown in the structures and processes that link them together.

Integration versus autonomy

The organisational structure of the Methodist Church does not allow local societies a high measure of autonomy. When the indicators used in the previous section are applied we find that on such things as allocation of funds, deployment of ministers, and so on, there is a high rate of denominational control. (Cantrell et al, 1983) Moreover, when the open systems framework is applied to this polity it seems clear that the denomination cannot be viewed as part of the environment, but has to be seen as an integral part of the overall organisation. Because of this structural position it is able to act as mediator of the environment, standing on the boundary, as it were, between the Society and the world outside.

Yet we have to set against that image the picture that emerges from the data of a Society which has (by default) attained a measure of autonomy. Care has to be taken not to overstate this, but there is a notable, if rather passive, resistance to the ideas and concerns of the denomination. One example of this is the debate over the future of the hall which will be looked at in a later chapter. For the present let me mention two less important but still significant illustrations of this point.

The first of these concerned the lay assistant. He was being used by the minister as an unofficial deputy while 'the team' was also anxious to make use of him, as indicated by his appointment as magazine editor, a post reserved usually for a minister. At the time of these attempts to integrate him into the leadership team there was a long running debate in The Methodist Recorder (1986, passim) about the role of the trained laity. Some wanted them to be given the same status as deacons in the Anglican Church, and be paid a salary. Here was the 'trigger' for a local discussion on the position of Central Hall's lay assistant. But it brought no response. The minute secretary suggested that it was such a controversial question that it could not be raised at formal meetings. She was able to list those members and leaders who, in her opinion, would be implacably opposed to any moves to give him official recognition.

Some of those involved suggested that this situation was due entirely to the intransigence of a few individuals. But this ignores the failure of what might be called the socialisation mechanisms to promote the denomination's views. When I interviewed the supposed opponents to this scheme it was clear that they did not realise that it had been mooted. They did not read the Methodist Recorder, were not privy to the team's deliberations, and if had been discussed at Circuit meetings they would not have known because their representative was no longer attending. This left just the minister, or some other bold individual, to broach the topic and open it up for discussion.

A second example of the breakdown between Central Hall and the denomination concerned a special campaign launched in 1985 under the title Mission Alongside the Poor. As the title suggests, it focused on the problem of urban deprivation and was supported by all sections of the Methodist Church. The response from Mid Glamorgan had been encouraging. The Circuit had organised a special rally and many of the individual societies were raising money for the fund. All of these activities were ignored by the people of Central Hall. There was just one mention made of the campaign during the Sunday evening notices. The Church Council minutes for that period did not mention MAP. Neither, it seems, had the Council received any reports on the work of the Circuit during that period.

These organisational obstacles, on their own, need not have been insurmountable. For example, the minister could have given the Council a report of Circuit activities, as could the minute secretary who was also involved. It is when we add these organisational factors to notions of the attitudes and perceptions of the members, as noted by other observers, that we see how essential they are if we are to provide a full explanation. Certainly, in any discussion of the relationship with the denomination they are crucial, especially so in this instance where the relationship has been formalised and constructed through a range of structures and procedures. When working efficiently these mechanisms should have allowed the denomination to mediate the social and political environment and so ensure that the Society's inputs had been duly processed, if not completely refined. This, in turn, suggests that the Society should have been engaged with the same topics and working their way through the same agenda as the denomination, even if the policies and attitudes which emerged were likely to be inconclusive and confused.

However, this study found, as did Moore (1974) and Clark (1982), that 'village Methodism may have certain characteristics that distinguish it from Methodism in general'. (Clark, 1982:88) Moore noted that the links between the Methodist Church and the congregations he studied were only 'formal and light'. (p.123) Clark, meanwhile, found 'considerable potential...for local congregations to work out their position in relation to their minister'. (p.78) Both observations are relevant to this discussion. Clark (1982) in particular emphasises the role of the minister while failing to realise that it was the conflict between laity and minister that was one of the prime causes for the ruptured relationship between denomination and congregation. This, certainly, is what emerged from the data presented here. Central Hall relied almost entirely on the minister to maintain denominational ties, simply because the other denomination-society mechanisms no longer worked.

Structural failure of this kind did not lead directly to the situation noted in the case of Cwmtref Baptist Church in which the local congregation has the ability to relegate the denomination to a place in the environment. To modify the basic relationship between the two levels of organisation to that

extent would require a stronger not a weaker Methodist Society. What had happened, however, was that extra weight had been thrown on the Society, its internal structures and processes, and the actors who belonged to it. In practical terms, this meant that the administration of the Society, and much of the day-by-day decision making, had devolved, usually to individuals within the Society. In other words the mediation and internal processing of outputs from the wider environment had become the responsibility of the Society and its members.

Congregation and denomination

In the introduction to this chapter it was suggested that it was difficult to categorise the denomination-congregation relationship in a consistent fashion. Classification of this kind would have to account for the difference between denominations, the variations across issues and over time, as well as the individual proclivities of congregations within the same denominational structure. In fact, one of the key elements in the attempts to produce a classification has been that of structure. Thus we find that the deceptive uniformity of 'the Free Churches' (Payne 1965) often distracts from the major differences in organisation (and theology) which exists within this sector of the Church. Awareness of these differences allows us to compare Cwmtref Baptist Church and its 'federative' denominational polity with Central Hall and the 'unitive' polity of the Methodist Church. (Cantrell et al, 1983)

We started, therefore, with an image of two congregations with distinctive experiences of the congregation-denomination relationship. It could be deduced from this that the Methodist Society, to take the most obvious example, would exhibit a much higher level of denominational socialisation than their Baptist counterparts. Yet the data led to the conclusion that both of these local churches had a degree of autonomy and were insulated from the influence of their respective denomination. While this finding arose out of the analysis of a rather specialised area within the life of the Church it was, nevertheless, surprising to find these clearly distinct organisations occupying a similar position in relation to their denomination.

This finding, however, is misleading, for while these two congregations have arrived at a similar position the route they took was entirely different. Hence the autonomy of the Baptist congregation was based on its economic independence, including the freedom to collect and allocate a wide range of resources. Despite these freedoms there was a strong element of dependency on the denomination, especially in the realms of identity and legitimacy. Through the application of an open systems framework we saw how the contradictory concepts of autonomy and dependence were expressed in structural terms. Thus, on the topic of social issues in particular, the congregation used its autonomy to relegate the denomination to the position of being part of the environment. That is, it set up a clear boundary between the denomination and itself, and implied that the denomination's outputs on this topic could either be rejected, ignored, or received and processed.

The polity of the Methodist Church, however, makes such unilateral action unlikely. Even if, as Moore (1974) and Clark (1982) suggest, the links between local ('village') Methodism and Methodism as a whole have been weakened, the impression voiced by the lay leaders of Central Hall was of the Circuit, in particular, as an agency of control if not of socialisation. Indeed, the evidence suggests that while the elements of control were still potent, the process of denominational socialisation had been seriously weakened. This meant that the denomination was failing to fulfil its role of mediator of the wider environment with the result that Central Hall's approach to social issues often failed to reflect the debate taking place within the Methodist Church as a whole.

Central Hall's 'freedom' from the influence of the Methodist Church was largely due to a modification of the organisational structure. We noted the breakdown in the conventional representative democratic processes and also in the failure of key agents such as the minister to make good that fracture. These changes reinforced the image, painted by some respondents, of a Society which had become introverted, isolated, and defensive. It was this growing isolation, noted by many respondents and highlighted by the lack of associational activities, that

had brought a corresponding increase in the importance of the 'internal' processes, structures, and agents of the Society itself.

It has begun to be recognised, therefore, that while the denominations have a role in influencing the response of their member congregations to social issues, the way that role is played, and its overall effectiveness, was not determined simply by the power and authority of the particular congregation, nor by the level of autonomy of the individual church. As this chapter has shown, the organisational structure which links church and denomination is also a key factor.

Other points to emerge from this discussion include how these two local churches were, for different reasons, able to select which denominational outputs they would receive, and in what way they would process them. The two cases also served to emphasise the importance of the minister as the agent who was in the best position to influence both the mediation and processing of denominational outputs. All of these points will be elaborated further as the focus widens to take in the more general religious environment of these local churches.

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5: The churches and their wider religious environment

Lyon(1985) notes how secularization studies have documented the splitting away of the Church from other social institutions. (p.13) The result, he argues, has been the 'uncoupling of Church and society' with organized religion being pushed to the edge of society and churches becoming much like other voluntary organisations. (pp.60-1) He goes on to describe a compensating increase in religious associational activities. As a result, there is on one hand the continued expansions of the ecumenical organisations at all levels while, leading in rather a different direction, there is 'the persistence and growth of 'conservative' Christianity. (p.117) In illustrating this latter movement he quotes from Bruce(1983):

There are conservative Protestant holiday camps, tours of the Holy Land, boarding houses for born-again travelling salesmen...an array of Bible study courses to match secular further education...For live entertainment there are crusades...

(p.465)

In this chapter I will be exploring the effect these changes in the environment had on the churches being studied. Both congregations featured here were open to the influence of the ecumenical movement. The Baptist Church was also involved in some of the 'conservative' evangelical activities described above. Alongside these formal aspects of the religious environment there existed a set of informal relations and processes which allowed each church to receive outputs from other religious organisations, and to form relationships with individuals from other congregations. Again, the emphasis will be on those outputs which relate to social issues, how they were mediated by the leaders of each church, and which of them were received as inputs by the individual organisations.

The ecumenical movement

The largest and most controversial of the ecumenical organisations is the World Council of Churches. Most of the controversy is over its political standpoint:

...The general stance emerging from the WCC assemblies, conferences, and consultations is persuasive and radical. It emphasises[sic] over and over again that the churches need to express their solidarity with the struggle against poverty and exploitation...It is clear that [its] general stance is an ecumenism of the left compared with the traditional stance of the churches down the centuries.

(Preston, 1983:86)

Martin(1978) comments on the bureaucratisation and standardisation of the WCC and also its 'existential cum marxist vocabulary of liberation'.(p.294) Certainly there are a wealth of 'persuasive and radical' ideas which either originates in or are promoted by the main ecumenical organisations. Some examples from the 1985 catalogue of the British Council of Churches are Christian Perspectives on Nuclear Weapons (Bailey, 1984); The closed door; a Christian critique of Britain's immigration policies (Jenkins, 1984) and Civil disobedience and Christian obedience (Mackie, 1983)

Wales has its own branch of the international ecumenical movement. The Council of Churches for Wales is affiliated to both the British and World Council of Churches. Though it lacks the resources of these major organisations it is still able to contribute to the debate within the Church on socio-political issues. Examples of its output range from the study-pack on the Church and politics sold at the 1986 National Eisteddfod to a publication (with University College, Cardiff) of a monograph entitled Toward a theology of work (Ballard, 1982) Its political awareness was also signalled by having Bishop Tutu of South Africa as the main guest for the Council's silver jubilee celebrations in 1986. In that same year it had helped promote the British Council of Churches' Lent study course "What on earth is the Church for?", enlisting the cooperation of many local council of churches and of BBC Wales who broadcast a series of discussion programmes. Among the questions raised in this course was 'how does the Church relate to the local community?'.

But during the previous year it was the Council of Churches for Wales itself that was open to question. This arose because of its controversial intervention in the miners' strike. A delegation was sent to lobby members of parliament and was rewarded with an almost exclusive interview with the then

Energy Secretary, Peter Walker. While this coup gained a lot of national publicity, many of the Council's other interventions went almost unnoticed. Some of its leaders worked with the miners' leaders, and attempted to liaise between them and other groups, such as the police. The Council also gave enthusiastic support to the Welsh Congress, a body which brought together unions, community leaders, and other interested parties. One of the members of the Congress said she was surprised at the willingness of the Council's representatives to become involved in such a highly political situation. Similar sentiments were expressed when some of the local council of churches sent observers to the picket lines and took part in demonstrations, including the final 'march back to work'. A former secretary of the Council suggested that this episode had shown that 'the world only recognised one Church'.

Be that as it may, the fact is that the Church at local level is still characterised by a proliferation of individual congregations bearing a variety of denominational labels. In many areas they co-exist with inter-denominational and ecumenical groups. Thus there are church councils who attempt to unite all of the mainstream denominations, including the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches. But there may also be Free Church councils made up of the nonconformist denominations. There are two councils and seven individual congregations in my home village of Aberfan (population 5,000). But it is the duplication at national level that seems to be causing the most concern. The 1985 Assembly of the Free Church Federal Council asked itself the perennial question; 'Is there need for a separate Free Church body alongside the British Council of Churches?'. The answer, yet again, was a qualified yes. (Annual Report, p.5)

The Free Churches of Cwmtref faced a different question. They were asked to consider what the Baptist pastor described as an 'airy-fairy' motion to replace the existing Free Church Council with a Churches Council, thus bringing in the Anglican and Catholic churches. The proposition was rejected thus alienating a sizeable number of fellow churchgoers and depriving the church leaders in the town of two qualified and professional colleagues. As a consequence, the Baptist pastor is the only full-time leader involved with inter-church affairs, though the Methodist minister

has an automatic place on the Free Church Council.

A more serious consequence of that decision is that it tends to reinforce nonconformist insularity. For even though there are many differences between the nonconformist denominations, the biggest gulf is still between them and both the Anglican Church and the Church of Rome. It also served to maintain their distance from the forthright political attitudes expressed by the British and World Council of Churches. True their own national body, the Free Church Federal Council, is concerned about 'the plight of minority groups, not least ethnic minorities and the unemployed' (Methodist Recorder, 13.3.86), but this is more than a step removed from the stance of the WCC which had moved 'away from a largely Western democratic concept of political responsibility to a more radical ideology...that came to embrace the concept and practice of liberation theology'. (Steare, 1984:145)

There was, therefore, little to motivate Cwmtref Free Church Council to discuss political or social issues. If anything, it seeks to avoid such issues. The Council sees its main objective as the promotion of good relations between the congregations. An aim which would not be served by debate which may descend into disagreement and conflict. Inter-denominational cooperation is maintained through a limited programme of fellowship and joint-worship. In practical terms, this involves coming together at Christmas and Easter plus an occasional special rally. For most of the Christian year they maintain a polite and rather cool relationship.

Many individuals accused the Council of lack of initiative. They noted that for a number of years all the Free Churches took part in a Whit-Sunday march of witness through the town centre. This came to an end in the early 1970's because the number of children attending Sunday schools had become too low. But this was not the only scheme which the Council failed to maintain. The former Methodist superintendent minister recalled how plans had been made to divide the town into sectors and give each minister pastoral responsibility for a specific sector. Preparations for the scheme had yielded some useful information about social problems and the needs of individuals, but it was never acted on with the result that, in his view, the churches had never achieved

the sort of 'consistent outreach' required. The senior deacon of the Baptist church also recalled an abortive inter-church programme. This had involved an evangelistic campaign aimed at the young of the area. Though the Baptist Church had offered to meet most of the initial costs and carry most of the work-load, the Council rejected the scheme.

The difference between the ambition and attitudes of the national and international ecumenical organisations and those of the almost moribund Council at Cwmtref was plain to see. Many of the respondents who had criticised the Council went on to suggest that the Baptist pastor should be commended for his efforts to increase the amount of inter-church activities. (This was balanced to some extent by complaints about his verbosity and excessive enthusiasm.) As the only full-time minister resident in the town, and the one with the lowest number of commitments, he was in the right position to take the lead. But, in his opinion, there was no need to go far beyond the present pattern of shared services. As far as he was concerned, worship and 'preaching the word' should be the priority for all Christian groups. This appeared to be the justification for his claim to be a-political which led him to refuse to answer any questions on issues such as the Council of Churches for Wales' intervention into the miners' strike.

He also confessed to some ignorance about the activities of the WCC and the BCC. This was borne out by an incident concerning the 1986 Lent study course mentioned earlier. One report claimed that the study booklet used in the course was a best seller, and noted that fifty-nine local radio stations had presented linked programmes. (Methodist Recorder, 10.4.86) Yet when I mentioned the study-group meeting in my own village the Pastor did not seem to understand what I was talking about. Some weeks later he mentioned to a small group of church leaders seeing a 'useful study booklet' in a SPCK shop. I refrained from pointing-out that this was the 'best-seller' which church groups from all over the country had been discussing.

It may well be that his view of the ecumenical movement was coloured by his personal circumstances, in a similar way to his attitude to denominational affairs. Many ministers are attracted to the ecumenical movement because it enables them to follow a specialisation or provides an outlet for their radical

tendencies, or provides an escape if they are 'irritated by the mundane expectations of their flock'. (Martin, 1978:294) The Revd Pryce, however, was more like that pastor categorised by Towler (1970-71) as 'Type B':

...satisfied with their work, answers social rejection of his[sic] role by rejecting society...defines role in parochial terms...conservative in approach to organisation and belief...
(pp.166-7)

'Conservatives' of this kind tend to see ecumenical activities as a distraction and waste of resources, not as a way forward. This view is not unknown in Baptist circles. One minister said he knew of colleagues who regarded ecumenism as a 'dirty word'. Others referred to those who were involved in the ecumenical movement as 'ecumaniacs'. No wonder, then, that the Baptist Union of Wales has been rather lax over ecumenical matters. The 1985 Assembly was told that the Union had failed to give full attention to the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Paper (No.111, 1982) because 'the Union is not affiliated to the British Council of Churches and there is uncertainty and lack of consensus in Baptist ranks'. (1985 Report, p.85) It was at this assembly that a belated attempt was made to make the Union a full constitutional member of the Free Church Federal Council.

Central Hall, however, appeared to be free from both the personal and denominational inhibitions about the ecumenical movement. Yet their input into inter-church activities was even less than that of the Baptist congregation. One reason for this was their minister's lack of involvement due to his other commitments. Because so much of his time was spent outside the town and in serving the Circuit as a whole he was restricted to supporting the main ecumenical events, without being active on the Council itself. His view of the Free Church Council and the range of inter-church activity at Cwmtref was instructive:

After a long ministry among English churches I find the situation in Cwmtref restrictive. Churches are open to other people and the type of organisation exists only as long as it does not show signs of threatening their own programme. This low degree of openness is only made possible because they no longer feel confident about themselves.

His criticisms, as he admitted, applied as much to Central

Hall as much as any of the other local churches. This was due to some extent by the attitude and expectations of the denomination. The Methodist Church seeks to preserve the loyalty and interest of its member societies. Hence, the potential clash of loyalties that result from the demands of the Circuit being different to the needs of the locality. Even if the Society rarely has to make the choice between two events, it does have to choose between two orientations. The Circuit underlines its own claims on the members of Central Hall by providing subsidised bus services for Circuit activities. Implied in this policy is the view that the financial cost and time involved in supporting the Circuit is justified. Some could see this as implying further that the Society's first allegiance should always be to the denomination even if this is difficult to reconcile with full participation in the religious activities of Cwmtref.

Not that such a view would be expressed openly. After all, the formal policy of the denomination is to cooperate without reservation in ecumenical ventures. Thus the Methodist Church is fully represented on all the main ecumenical organisations including the Council of Churches for Wales. This did nothing for the leaders and members of Central Hall who displayed how ambivalent they felt about local ecumenical activities.

A classic example of their uncertainty occurred when the minute secretary was elected president of the Free Church Council. It was announced at a Sunday morning service that the new president would be installed at a special service to be held the following Wednesday. But the name of the new president was not announced, despite the fact that she was sitting in the congregation. After the service I asked the steward why she had not underlined the fact that the president was an officer of the Society. She replied, 'I didn't know anyone still went to that [the Free Church Council]... Jim used to go but I don't think he bothers now'. The minute secretary pointed-out that not only did Jim still sit on the council but so did she, and had done so long enough to earn her turn at the presidency. Yet, the president herself seemed unfamiliar with the ways of the other Free Churches. We went together to a special service at the Baptist Church. During the service she asked in a whisper, 'what are the little chairs in the front for?'. Apparently, she knew nothing

about the 'set fawr' and the traditional practice of giving priority to deacons and visiting dignitaries.

Both congregations, therefore, gave only limited support to local ecumenical activities. This apathetic attitude extended beyond their locality to the ideas and beliefs promoted by many of the ecumenical organisations. Because the local activity was worship-centred, and so many of the leaders ill-informed, it was difficult to see how these local churches could become involved in the controversial debates initiated by the British and World Council of Churches. It seems, therefore, that the other Free Churches in Cwmtref were, like the Baptist and Methodist congregations, uninterested in current affairs - both secular and religious. Again the contrast with my own village is stark. In Aberfan it has been customary for inter-group groups to discuss the same topics as those that occupied the ecumenical organisations, and also to investigate the doctrines and practices of individual denominations. During any church year there is likely to be a visit from an official of Christian Aid, or from delegates to, say, the Assembly of the World Council of Churches. Extensive use is also made of the Council of Churches for Wales which often supplies the speaker for inter-denominational rallies. At Cwmtref the difference in attitude was obvious. Inter-church services tended to be the same as those conducted by individual congregations, with local ministers or denominational leaders taking turn to preach.

If we use this overview to examine the position of the two congregations we find that, at a formal level, they experienced only limited inter-action with each other and the other congregations in the town. It is also clear that most of the heavily publicised outputs of the ecumenical movement were not being received by these congregations. Two reasons have been suggested for this. One concerns the organisational structure of the local ecumenical arena which gives control of information to the Free Church Council which had appeared as insular, introverted, and lacking in ambition. Alongside the 'failure' of this particular type of organisational structure was the inability of the individual congregations, and their main agents the ministers, to bridge the gap thus created. In this way the ministers, though for different reasons, proved to be effective mediators of the output of the ecumenical movement. The result was that the powerful and controversial messages emanating from the ecumenical organisations

on social and political matters could not be seen as an influence on the response of these particular congregations.

Informal processes and relations

Along with the growth of the ecumenical organisations there has been an increase in the amount of informal cooperation between local churches. At Aberfan, for example, it is now quite common for congregations with similar theological standpoints to occasionally worship together or indulge in 'pulpit swapping' (exchanging ministers for one Sunday). Over the years these small ventures into cooperation rather than competition have brought a noticeable change in the religious climate and the social relations between individual churchgoers. Now it is acceptable for Catholics to talk to, even worship with, Protestants. The same is true of the other opposing camps - the English and the Welsh churches. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of this new situation is the twice-yearly Churches Council's 'outing'. This involves members of all the religious organisations in the village going off together for a day trip which always culminates with 'a tea'. It is the symbolic nature of the shared meal, as well as the free-flow of gossip, which underlines the way a Christian community is beginning to be created. But how different things were at Cwmtref.

My very first visit to Cwmtref made me realise just how big the difference was. I had decided to make my first visit into the field an informal one. So I turned-up unannounced at the Baptist Church's market day coffee morning. In charge on that particular Thursday was a lady deacon and her friend, one of the staff of the Sunday school. After introducing myself I asked them for some general information about the churches in the town, and their ministers. They had met the vicar of the Anglican Church but could not remember his name, mainly because it was 'funny and foreign-sounding' (Dutch in origin). Central Hall had a minister but they did not know who he was (He had been at the Hall for over two years). They also struggled to remember the names of any of the current members. Eventually, they recalled a local builder who 'used to be something there'.

Yet both of these respondents had been born and brought-up in the town. They had been chapelgoers all their lives and attended the Free Church Council's special services. It was strange, then, that they knew so little of other churchgoers, even though they occasionally worshipped with them. But they were

not alone in this respect. Few of the respondents from Central Hall were sure of who exactly attended the Baptist Church. One or two knew the senior deacon, but most of them were acquainted with Revd Pryce. One of the older members, remembered him from the days before he was a minister. It was, however, his contribution to united services that had established his reputation for 'hogging the limelight', as one Methodist steward put it.

Some of the remarks made by the Methodist respondents revealed that relations between the two congregations were both cool and distant. In some ways this could be expected given the large number of differences in outlook and experience already described. Even so, the changes that had taken place over recent years could have made closer relations between them both advantageous and easier to achieve. The decline of the Welsh language denominations, and the closure of other causes such as 'the Prims', left them as the only two congregations in the town who worshipped in the same language and belonged to the Free Churches. Given their own decline, and the lack of a lead from the Free Church Council, the need for them to move closer together was clear. There was little sign of this happening, though Central Hall had made a breakthrough by inviting a Baptist lay preacher to take a Sunday service. This move, however, had come from the pulpit steward, not the Society itself, and was the result of the never-ending search for someone to occupy the pulpit. Even if this was an olive branch, it was unlikely to be returned. The Baptist Church policy was not to invite ministers, let alone lay preachers, from other denominations.

So the two organisations were no nearer to one another than they had ever been. Neither was there much change at the level of the individual members. Again, there was an organisational problem at the heart of this situation. Cwmtref was short of the kind of 'respectable' community ventures which can unite chapelgoers. They tend to gravitate to committee work or worthy causes with charitable objectives. The only organisation to fit these requirements was 'Toc H', which met fortnightly and sought to raise money for national charities. Three or four members of each congregation attended Toc H meetings and it had produced a close friendship between two of the older women members.

I had the opportunity of interviewing the two friends together. One was almost a decade older than the other and her background was English. They did, however, share a Valleys'

upbringing and had both been recently widowed. Despite their long and close friendship, they were surprisingly ignorant of each other's chapel life. The only time their reminiscences coincided was when they discussed past ministers of both congregations who had become well-known in the town. Apart from recalling these 'giants of the past' there was little common ground. Indeed, they seemed to be learning things about their respective churches as they went along.

Another arena for individuals to build bridges was the Citizen's Advice Bureau based in the town. It was headed by a Methodist steward and included on its voluntary staff two Baptists, another Methodist member, and a further Methodist on the management committee. I spoke to all the participants and made the point of mentioning their colleagues. Without exception, they referred to each other by their surnames and made no reference to the chapel background of the individual concerned. Once more the impression was of a respectful but far from warm set of social relations which were carefully confined to the job in hand. When I leaked information, such as about the Baptist member who had once been a deacon, the Methodist respondents knew nothing about it.

While on all levels relations between the congregations were distant and ill-informed, at the level of the organisations themselves there was an element of rivalry and competition. Complaints were made about the Baptist Church 'poaching' a former member of Central Hall. The friends mentioned above were both leaders of women's groups within their own churches. As auxiliary organisations they were able to accept members of other churches; though this was restricted to those who did not have a group of their own. This meant that the Methodists and Baptists remained apart. It was also significant that when they sought to work or worship with another women's organisation they chose those that belonged to their denomination rather than a local one. Mrs Travers, secretary of the Baptist sisterhood, described the attitude of her own church:

I have always deplored its exclusiveness. Echoes of it still remain. The church is still unwilling to grant full membership to former members of other churches. [i.e. those who do not practise adult baptism by immersion]. It used to be very narrow with some ministers more dictatorial than others...many still think of the church as it was in the

old days when it was THE church, not just in the town but in the whole valley.

Here was a clear indication of the force of the social barriers that existed between the nonconformist denominations. (Morgan, 1981:16) Mrs Travers suggested that the present pastor was working hard to remove these obstacles and was anxious to promote a more liberal attitude to the question of how they should relate to other churches. At one level this was true, as his work with the Free Church Council demonstrated. Yet he could be regarded as one of the agents responsible for preserving the gulf between the Baptist church and other local congregations. The most obvious example was his enforcement of the unwritten rule that the pulpit should be reserved for Baptists. Such a stance invalidated most of the concessions that were being made at a social level. For while it was permitted for Baptist members to mingle with other Christians it was too risky to expose them to someone who may fail to preach 'The Gospel'.

The combination of a low level of social interaction between the members and almost complete absence of formal cooperation between the congregations themselves, greatly reduced the influence of the local religious environment. We can add to this the weakness of the ecumenical movement at this level which, in turn, made it difficult for inputs from the wider ecumenical movement to be received. This set of circumstances reinforces the image gained in the previous chapter of two congregations who were largely isolated, and insulated, from most environmental influences. In reaching this conclusion, attention has again been drawn to the structural and organisational factors. For churches with a long history of working independently, and even in competition, to begin working together some mechanism is required. Furthermore, there has to be some enthusiastic and energetic activity by the agents concerned. Neither requirements were being met at Cwmtref.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that these organisations were completely cut-off from their religious environment. It has already been suggested that they accepted a rather limited range of inputs from their respective denominations. Both congregations were also open to the wider religious environment, even though the processes by which they accepted these particular inputs were rather haphazard. As far as

Central Hall was concerned it was the inadequate arrangements for filling the pulpit each Sunday which exposed them to a variety of religious environmental influences. Thus within one calendar month they could hear sermons preached by extreme fundamentalists or religious liberals. The Chairman of the District may alternate with the Rector of a neighbouring Anglican Church, or with fledgling preachers seeking to become accredited lay preachers. The range of theological perspectives and preaching styles was immense.

In sharp contrast, Cwmtref Baptist Church's pulpit was dominated by the pastor. He was able to provide a consistent approach and to maintain a clear theological line. This will be fully assessed in the next chapter, but it is worth noting here which part of the religious environment appeared to influence him most.

Apart from the Bible itself, the main source used for his sermon material was the inter-denominational, evangelical literature, especially that concerned with church growth. He also mentioned the impetus he had received from a visit to one of Billy Graham's evangelical rallies. In fact, one of the regular Billy Graham publications was always left for visitors on the vestibule table, alongside the denominational quarterly. Evangelical literature and audio cassettes were used for the house groups, themselves a characteristic of the church growth movement. One of the few outside preaching engagements he accepted was to another Baptist church in the same district which also had an evangelical orientation. In a number of services he testified to the inspiration received from united prayer meetings and evangelical rallies. During one sermon, he described a prayer meeting which had lasted for three hours and during which many people had wept openly.

The fact that the evangelical movement (like the ecumenical movement) is able to span denominations enabled him to forego the principle that only Baptists could preach the 'true Gospel'. So evangelists, whose denominational allegiance was uncertain, were not just allowed to preach but were paid to lead an evangelical campaign. While it is feasible for a minister and his church to support both the ecumenical and evangelical movements, it is rather unlikely. Among the obvious obstacles of such a mixed

alliance, is the difference in theological emphasis (often demonstrated most clearly on social questions) and the practical problems arising from the shortage of time and other resources available to local churches. Most congregations, therefore, have to choose in what direction they want to invest their energies, though some, like Central Hall, are unwilling, or unable, to commit themselves to any of the inter-denominational groupings. In a sense, therefore, the fact that Cwmtref Baptist Church had opted to receive inputs from the evangelical sector of the Christian Church meant that they had to block-off the outputs from the ecumenical movement and the more socially involved religious influences.

The situation at Cwmtref Baptist Church leads us to the same conclusion as that reached in the previous chapter; that the outputs of the wider religious environment, as well as those of the denomination, were being powerfully mediated by the pastor. At Central Hall, the mediation process was less effective resulting in a mixed, and often contradictory, set of environmental influences. It is time now to move on in order to look at those mediation processes a little more closely and also to assess how these environmental inputs were processed by the local churches and transformed into outputs.

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6:Transforming inputs into outputs:the 'internal' processes of the two churches

The use of an analytical framework based on open systems theory has led us to highlight the way transactions between these two local churches and their environment was mediated. While recognising that the denominations are involved with these mediating activities, the peculiar circumstances of these particular churches gave greater weight to what may be called their 'internal' processes. That is the role of agents and structures which are an integral part of each individual organisation. Furthermore, the evidence presented so far suggests that this process, at the level of the single organisation, was dominated by a single agent; the minister. This preliminary finding, however, has yet to be substantiated. One of the aims of these chapters is to assess the role played by other agents, for example the lay leaders, and also the mediation process itself. What are the structures and procedures which facilitate decisions about what inputs should be accepted, and which should be rejected?

In answering that kind of question we, inevitably, begin to uncover the subsequent process which takes inputs and transforms them into outputs. In this instance, the main concern is with how ideas and arguments about the church's attitude to social questions are 'imported' by each of these congregations and then 'exported' in the form of their own response to social issues. (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Pugh et al, 1983). The model used in describing and analysing this process of transformation is based on the work of Watson (1987). He is careful to draw the distinction between formal and informal practices, which suggests a separation between the codified administrative procedures of each organisation and those unwritten procedures that have evolved through tradition, precedence, and the (continued) interaction between agents. Thus it is possible to distinguish the written constitution of the Baptist Church and those procedures that are based upon it, from the informal codes of conduct and 'interactive patterns of human activity', (Silverman, 1970:204) which were revealed by this investigation.

Watson(1987) points out that these activities are only 'conceptually or analytically distinct' and underlines their basic dialectical relationship.(p.209) Even so, it is essential to make the distinction and to provide sound analytical categories. It was this need that led to the emphasis in this study on the informal elements and to draw them together under the notion of organisational culture. This was defined in chapter one as 'the product of individual and group meaning which draw on experience, shared assumptions, and the interaction between old and new ways of understanding'. (Bartunek, 1984; Watson, 1987) It should also be pointed out the 'product' of such a culture can be structural, even though it is not codified. Thus the notion, for example, of 'this is the way things are always done' can constrain and determine activities and events.

One reason why Watson(ibid.) drew on the concept of organisational culture was the need to reveal the full range of micropolitical activity and internal politicking which characterise single organisations. It may not convey the same image as Ball's (1987) view of the 'concrete messiness of empirical research [inside schools]'(p.1.), but it does indicate a complex interaction between people and processes. Care is needed, therefore, in identifying and describing all of those aspects of the life of the local church which are relevant to its 'output'. In the case of these two churches the main agents have been identified as the minister, the lay leaders, the congregation, individual members, and any subsidiary organisations. Thus, each section of the ensuing discussion begins with a description of these agents, together with the polity that binds them together. As in previous chapters, the two churches are looked at separately before embarking on a comparative analysis.

One final preliminary point regarding the role of the formal structure. While Ball's(ibid.) dire warnings about structural determination, reification, and the like are noted, it still needs to be acknowledged that the internal polity of these churches is central in that it reflects their theological orientation, allocates appropriate roles to the actors concerned, and partly determines their social relations. Hence, for example, the differences discovered between the office of steward in the Methodist society and the Baptist deacon.

Cwmtref Baptist Church

The theological underpinning for the polity of the Baptist Church is the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. It is this principle that, as noted earlier, gives the local Baptist church precedence over the denomination. When related to the 'internal' polity of these churches, it ensures that the ultimate responsibility should reside with the congregation through the mechanism of the Church Meeting. But even though this principle is staunchly defended, there is evidence to suggest that the polity often produces a 'ruling elite' -denominational officers, local lay leaders, or individual ministers. (cf. Harrison, 1969)

Given this contradiction, it would be unwise to make any easy assumptions about the locus of power and authority in Cwmtref Baptist Church. During my time as a church secretary and deacon I was made aware of how often the balance of power can shift, and how it varies both over time and between churches. At my own church an era can be identified when the congregation succeeded in thwarting the efforts of its leaders (due mainly to the influence of one malcontent). But most of my contemporaries agree that for most of its history, it was the congregation which was dominated by the lay leaders, particularly the elders (senior deacons). There were, however, two occasions when the authority of the lay leadership was challenged successfully. They serve as a useful introduction to the situation found at Cwmtref.

The first of these incidents took place in the early 1950's. A new minister had been allocated, fresh from theological college and university. He arrived with a programme for the church which the lay leaders regarded, with hostility, as being

'modernistic'. Among its more radical proposals was that the sermon should be the basis for discussion and not seen as some kind of definitive statement. It was also suggested that rather than use a Biblical text for a topic or title these could be found in current events. One less imaginative example was to announce his treatise on church doctrine under the rubric 'What's my line?'; the most popular television programme at the time. He also proposed holding discussions at the coal face of the local colliery and opening the church to non-members and providing facilities such as a youth club and a Men's Forum, modelled on the 'Miners' Parliaments' of the 1930's. Even though these plans were opposed by most of the lay leaders, and a number of members, the minister succeeded in implementing them.

The second incident also involved a challenge to the authority of the lay leaders, but this time it came from within the congregation. A group of younger members and deacons had found themselves in charge of the grandiosely named Christian Education Department (Sunday School and Youth Club). They used that position to introduce another set of controversial ideas and methods. This department had its own resources and near autonomy, so it was able to launch a magazine and use experimental forms of worship. It also engaged in charitable projects linked to local needs rather than that of 'missions overseas'. This challenge was also successful though those involved had their just reward when a few years later they found themselves regarded as the establishment and had to try and combat a similar type of 'fifth column' activity.

Some of those involved at the time said that they were unaware of those internal power struggles. This may reflect the ability of church leaders and others to preserve the church's image of a cohesive organisation with a high level of consensus. Certainly, this was the view most of the respondents had of Cwmtref Baptist Church. None of them had anything but vague memories of past disagreements, despite the fact that two of the most critical cases of internal strife are recorded in the latest of the church histories. (Davies, 1980) This same history also contains some coded references to the problems encountered when a young, inexperienced pastor came to the church; an event which will be described in detail later in this chapter. Before that, there is need to describe the formal organisational structure of the church and the special place it gives to the Church Meeting.

The organisational structure

It did not take long for the founder members to adopt the same type of organisational arrangements as other Welsh Baptist churches. One of their first moves was to appoint five deacons; all men. Next came the election - 'for administrative purposes' - of a treasurer, secretary, organist, choir conductor and a Sunday school superintendent. They were careful to recognise the efforts of the railway inspector who led the move to found a new cause: he was appointed to five posts, treasurer, choir conductor, Sunday School Superintendent, and deacon. (ibid. p. 2) But the more exalted tasks of 'conducting the fellowship' or 'preaching the word' were allocated to outside ministers or lay preachers. One was given a special mention: 'Mr George Harris, a local colporteur, who took over the preaching duties originally'. (ibid. p. 3)

The congregation waited until they had their own building before searching for a full-time pastor. It took two years to find a suitable and willing candidate. In 1902 a Reverend Harri Edwards accepted their call, 'so signalling the transition from the pastoral to the non-pastoral regime'. (Davies, 1980:3) With the minister came a more formalised structure: 'The foundation was laid for enlightening the members of their obligations and duties, and rules were drafted for the conduct of Church Meetings'. (idem.) In 1943 these rules were revised but they still stress the members' obligations:

[They must] solemnly regard all matters pertaining to the church as strictly private. (Covenant No.4)

[and] to abide, in all decisions of the church, by the will and desire of the majority. (No.6)

(Rule 2) Church Meetings be held as often as necessary provided notice is given at the previous service of divine worship.

(7) That a special meeting shall be called by the officers upon a written request signed by two-thirds of the members.

(10) That no business of importance introduced by any member shall be taken into consideration at any meeting unless notice in writing, specifying the subject be handed to the church secretary seven day[sic] previously.

The constitution, therefore, seeks to limit the intervention of the members into the decision making process. At the same time, it codifies the obligations and responsibilities which accompany church membership. Neither the lay leaders or the pastor were subject to such a rigorous definition of their position. In fact, the pastor's duties and obligations are mentioned just once, in Rule (18):

The pastor is required to preside at all meetings. In the absence of the pastor, the treasurer to preside.

The attempt was made, then, to give the church a strong constitutional framework, but it can still be regarded, like others with a congregational polity, as being 'loosely organised'. (Davidson et al. 1969:315) This can be illustrated by the requirement for the Church Meeting to meet just once a quarter; though special meetings could be called in the meanwhile. As a result, the lay leaders were left for long periods to take and implement decisions. The Church Meeting, was regarded as little more than a legislative chamber. All the business it discussed came in the form of reports and recommendations from the leaders. The equivalent, in other words, of the full council which endorses (and sometimes criticises) the work of its sub-committees and officers.

The organisational structure, therefore, serves to limit the power of the membership while giving considerable authority to the lay leaders. At the same time, it determines that the lay leaders should work closely with the pastor. He was required to submit his programme to the diaconate for approval, and to report regularly on his work. At Cwmtref, the diaconate met fortnightly which allowed them to monitor the pastor's actions very closely. The frequency of these meetings reflected the organisational culture rather than its formal structure. That is, it had been set by custom and illustrated how this church sought to legitimate the authority of its lay leaders.

From this brief description of the polity of Cwmtref Baptist Church it is possible to discern the characteristics of the formal organisational structure, the position it

accords certain agents, and the type of social relations it produces. Now a more detailed look at the key agents.

The members and the Church Meeting

As noted earlier, the Church Meeting is meant to enshrine the basic principles of the Baptist polity, yet, at Cwmtref, it was little more than a legislative body. Furthermore, much of the legislation involved was retrospective. In some cases, due to the long gap: between meetings, the decisions endorsed by the Church Meeting had already been implemented. The bulk of these decisions could be regarded as routine and not requiring debate, but on occasions the diaconate and minister were able to take steps which had far-reaching implications. One example was the search for a new minister which was handled by the officers .

None of the members interviewed saw any contradiction between these procedures and the traditional 'democracy' of the nonconformist movement. (Davies, 1981) This indicates, perhaps, the high level of trust and loyalty accorded the lay leaders; a crucial feature of the Baptist polity. The authority given to the lay leadership can be a congregation's greatest asset. It can also be the source of stress and conflict. For this system depends on the ability of the deacons and officers to retain the legitimacy accorded by their particular congregation. In the event of a breakdown in the relationship between the two groups it would be the membership that could assert its right to override the decisions made by the officers, and to subject their activities to much closer scrutiny.

This situation, however, was made unlikely simply because the officers at Cwmtref controlled the frequency and the agenda of Church Meetings. True, there had been two periods of conflict in the past which had led to the resignation of some of the deacons,

but the evidence presented here suggests that the lay leaders were careful to foster the goodwill of the congregation. In this respect, if no other, the principle of congregational control was being observed.

During the eighteen-month period of my field research the Church Meeting met only once, in spite of the stipulation for quarterly meetings. The occasion in question was the Annual General Meeting. When this was announced the congregation was told that members would receive a copy of the financial statement before the meeting. None of the other reports were circulated, neither was there a published agenda. I was told by the pastor that no 'outsiders' would ever be admitted to Church Meetings or meetings of the diaconate. This ban poses problems when the members have to be consulted on an urgent matter. This happened twice during the research. The first was called to hear a plea for support for the proposed pageant to celebrate the anniversary of the district association. The second concerned the arrangements for the evangelical mission planned for the spring of 1986. I was present at the first of those meetings simply because I was not asked to leave. But for the second I, and the other 'outsiders' present, was skilfully ushered out by the pastor and a posse of deacons. It seems that the first topic was considered to be of general interest, but the second was an internal matter.

While the first of those extra-ordinary meetings was much different to the more formal and more serious regular business sessions, it did give a brief insight into the nature of the social relations enjoyed by this particular congregation.

The most noticeable feature was the good humour displayed by all of those involved. Throughout the brief discussion there was an atmosphere of genial camaraderie even though the

meeting had been called to register a complaint about the lack of support for the project. Many said that this friendly ambience was commonplace at Church Meetings. Certainly, there was no evidence of any open disagreements during the period of the research. The two most important items on the agenda had been the arrangements for the special mission and, later, the election of a new secretary and three new deacons. Both of these, during the public stage, had been dealt with efficiently and without any sign of dissent.

But there was another side to that picture. Some individual respondents revealed their anxiety about the problem of finding a suitable secretary, others were nervous about the prospect of the evangelistic mission, and uncertain whether this was the right approach to recruitment. Even the election of deacons had ruffled some feathers. One of the successful candidates (a schoolteacher) was criticised. She was, said one member, a 'part-timer' who rarely attended on Sunday mornings. Someone else involved with the same conversation said 'she'll have to pull her finger out now'.

None of these rumblings were allowed to distort the image of a united congregation with a membership that fully supported its leaders. Other studies have noted the absence of overt member-leader conflict. (cf. Dempsey, 1964; Ingrams, 1980) Ingrams (ibid.) provides some reasons for what he suggests is the acquiescence of the membership. He found that members tend to be apathetic and ill-informed. They also lack the experience and knowledge required to participate in organisations where the lines of authority are not strictly codified. Another reason, he suggests, lies in the ethos of the 'fellowship of believers', which indicates that Christian love is inconsistent with shows of

with internal dissent. Finally, he notes that such dissent would impair the function of the congregation. (p.43.) Others (including Ingrams(1981).) have concentrated on the ability of the clergy to control and socialise their members. (cf. Carroll, 1981; Houghland and Wood, 1979; Clark, 1984.) A point that will be taken-up later. For the moment I would like to stay with Ingram's (1980) prescription for an acquiescent membership and apply it to the congregation at Cwmtref.

The notion of apathy is one subscribed to by the members themselves. Many of the respondents complained about (other people's) apathy. The chief target was the younger male members who, it was suggested, bore the responsibility for maintaining the fabric of the building as a D.I.Y. project. Leaving aside such ambitious hopes and accepting that the congregation had once been much larger and younger, we are left with the fact that this congregation was more committed and more resourceful than many of its members would admit. There was a nucleus of between thirty and forty enthusiastic and hard-working members who not only maintained the building in good order but also managed to staff a number of auxiliary organisations.

I do not accept that this group was apathetic. Neither did it qualify as inexperienced and lacking in knowledge. Most of those concerned had been brought-up in the Baptist Church, and a number of them knew a lot about its procedures and doctrines. It was significant that this group included three former deacons, two lay preachers, and six officers of church organisations. They provided a reservoir of commitment, knowledge and experience. In a situation where there is a lack of formalised procedures,

they could have produced dissent rather than acquiescence.

One reason why this did not happen is also mentioned by Ingrams(ibid.) The concept of the 'fellowship of love' is an important feature of the policy and attitudes of this congregation. In fact, their bid to promote such an image had become something of a campaign. The 'have a nice day' syndrome was much in evidence, as was the religious equivalent of National Smile Week. I became aware of this on my very first Sunday visit. I had intended finding a seat away from the other worshippers so that I could take notes unobtrusively. But as I slid into the chosen pew I was joined by another member of the congregation who had walked through the vestibule in order to reach me. He told me afterwards that it was their policy not to let 'strangers' sit alone.

Another feature of the same policy was the endless round of handshakes and greetings which preceded and followed each service. I was surprised to find the Pastor saying hello as I walked-in and good-bye as I left. This wasn't preferential treatment. All the congregation received the same attention. It was even extended to one chap who had been described to me on various occasions as 'a bore' and 'a pain'. I was told to avoid having him as my neighbour during worship. One women member decribed the tactic she used to 'keep him at bay'. Yet these personal animosities were carefully disguised in the interests of preserving the image of a loving, close-knit church family.

There were also some strong structural obstacles placed in the way of potential dissenters. Remember that the Church Meeting met only occasionally (less frequently than the

constitution demanded at this time) and most of its business had been 'pre-digested'. This meant that any complaints would be out-of-date and could be construed as an act of disloyalty. Given that all the items on the agenda had already been discussed by pastor and officers and, in most instances, they were offering a recommendation, any opposition could be seen as a challenge to the knowledge, experience and legitimacy of the leadership. When those factors are considered together, the Church Meeting seems far from an ideal democratic mechanism, let alone the source of authority and control in the Baptist polity.

There still remained the option of extra-democratic action. I gave the illustration earlier of an opposition group working from a base in one of the congregation's auxiliary organisations. Even when a base of this kind does not exist, it is possible that individuals or ad hoc groups could exert pressure and influence on their leaders. In this case, however, there was no direct evidence to suggest that kind of activity, but it was possible to identify some cliques within the congregation, and spot those who had a special relationship with the pastor and lay leaders. The seating pattern for Sunday services (appendix 2.) suggested the presence of five cliques. Some of these were family based. One was centred on the pastor's wife, while a third consisted mainly of the staff of the Junior Church (Sunday School).

Further evidence of connections between various individuals and groups emerged during interviews. For example, one woman deacon made constant reference to another member who was an officer of the Junior Church. When I interviewed this person, the deacon's name was mentioned frequently. I noted afterwards that they shared coffee morning and flower arranging duties,

and arrived for services together. More circumstantial data came from the way the pastor's greetings varied in length and intimacy, the presence of social links between the pastor and a few members, and the tendency of the senior deacon to spend a lot of time in whispered conversation with another member.

When Harrison (op.cit.) noted the importance of these interpersonal and intergroup relationships in the Baptist Church, he interpreted them as the means used by the leaders to gain and exercise power. (p.441) It is possible, of course, that members could use the same means to influence leaders. Such a conclusion could not be substantiated in this case, simply because of the absence of any other indicators of 'member-power.' Indeed, the fact that the lay leaders had accrued so much power and authority leads one to assume that it was they who were gaining advantage from the informal processes. There is not enough detailed data available to make it absolutely certain in whose favour these informal relations worked, but in most instances they were formed and maintained by the leaders. One example of this was the pastor's attempt to court a new member who happened to be a county-councillor. The pastor also appeared to socialise a great deal with two particular members, both of whom were fervent supporters of his ministry. Then there was the member who was the confidant of the senior deacon. He was the person most involved with repair work on the building. Here, then, were some examples of the church leaders using their personal relations with some of the members for their own purposes.

Even so, the congregation was large and strong enough to pose some kind of threat to its leaders. The natural base for any

attempt at a leadership coup remained the auxiliary organisations. At Cwmtref, these organisations were virtually autonomous with the right to appoint their own officers and arrange their own programme. They were constrained, however, by the knowledge that they used the building 'on licence', and that a full report of their activities had to be presented to the Annual Church Meeting. Yet, the Junior Church, the Sisterhood, and the Men's Own were all in the position to promote alternative approaches and policies. Of these, it was the men's group that was in the strongest position and had the greatest motivation.

While the Junior Church and the Sisterhood (Women's Meeting) tended to favour religious activities and the Bible-centred patterns of worship used elsewhere in the church, the Men's Own concerned itself more with the 'things of the world'. To help them do this they recruit a series of speakers who, in some way, are involved with social problems. For the 1985-6 session they invited the head of the local social services department, the leader of the local YMCA (twice), and their local M.P. Such a programme was consistent with the aims of their parent body, the Baptist Men's Movement. The National President for 1986 suggested, however, that they needed to act as well as listen:

There are so many things to be done. What are the needs of the local mentally and physically handicapped people? What about the unemployed youngsters? Do the social services need to have people to call on for help? Does your local church need a task force?

(Baptist Times, 27.3.86)

The men of Cwmtref may have been able to answer those first

four questions, but chose to ignore the prompt for action contained in the fifth. It was not just a case of them taking a passive role. More significant for this discussion was their inability, or unwillingness, to interest the remainder of the congregation in these social issues. After all, their programme provided a stark alternative to the Bible-centred 'other-worldly' approach of the pastor. Perhaps this was one reason why they kept such a low profile. Their reticence had developed to the point where you had to become a member to find out what they were doing. None of the women respondents knew much about their activities. Many described it jokingly as 'the boys' group', perhaps in retaliation for their own isolation in The Sisterhood. If the group was concerned about its image, it did nothing to change it. The gender barrier was rigidly enforced, even to the extent of preferring men speakers. In my view, however, the main reason for its failure to translate its concerns into practical ventures, or to encourage such a response from the congregation as a whole, was that the group was dominated by the pastor and deacons.

The president at this time was a former deacon, the secretary still a member of the diaconate. All of the male deacons were members, as was the pastor. I was particularly interested in the pastor's behaviour at these meetings. He was not an office-holder of the group and had no official role or responsibility. Despite this lack of recognition, he did succeed in making his presence felt. One device he used was to busy himself with the menial tasks; arranging chairs, opening doors, serving tea, giving out hymn-books etc. If his intention was to underline his position as an 'ordinary' member of the group with equal status to the others, it gave me the opposite impression. First, it left no doubt

about him being present, and not just as an unobtrusive observer. Moreover, these acts of humility came over as a demonstration that he was the man who gets things done, who 'keeps the show on the road', not afraid to turn his hand to anything.

This impression was reinforced by the way he would gently suggest to the chairman for the evening 'perhaps we ought to begin'. Then, again, he would always be involved in the discussions that usually followed each talk. Usually this was done without any prompting but on a few occasions the secretary or the chairman would ask for his views, implying that the group was in need of his special knowledge and experience. I believe that this high level of deference, combined with the active presence of the pastor, made it extremely difficult for this group to even contemplate activities that were not in line with the policies and attitudes promoted by him. Some of the data to be reported later reveals that while the Men's Group was listening to guest speakers concerned about social problems, the pastor was leading the congregation as a whole away from such issues by his emphasis on 'spiritual' matters. These two perspectives are not always seen as incompatible. At Cwmtref, however, the commitment to evangelism left neither time nor resources for other initiatives.

The bulk of the evidence indicates that the church members had only a minimal role both in mediating inputs from the environment and in transforming those inputs into outputs. We have been able to observe this at two levels. At the level of the formal administrative procedures we found the Church Meeting which has the ultimate authority in the decision making process yet was almost completely ineffective. One reason for this lies in the procedures themselves which restricts the Church Meeting to that of a legislative body but which, under the present

administration, is deprived of any consultative or supervisory functions it might have. Evidence was also found to indicate that it was a body that was characterised by acquiescence and deference to the leadership. Again there are strong structural reasons for this situation, such as the amount of discretionary power invested in the lay leaders in particular. But this was not the full story. As shall be seen later, the organisational culture played a large part in determining the extent of the power and authority accorded to the leaders.

We saw a glimpse of this in the behaviour of the pastor at the Men's Own group, where he had no formal role. The fact that this group, dominated by lay leaders, placed the pastor in such a special position indicates the strength of the ethos of 'the pastor' which had developed among this congregation over time.

This same mix of inadequate formal procedures and informal practices dominated by an elitist perspective was observed in other areas where the members may have expected to contribute to the church's output. The result was that neither auxiliary groups or individual members were able to exert any marked influence on the policy and attitudes of the church. These circumstances, I would argue, were not the creation of the present leadership. Even so, they were able to take advantage of them in their bid to become the most powerful of the agents within the organisation. While the duopoly of pastor and lay leaders had triumphed over the membership there is no reason to believe that the power and authority was equally shared among them or that their influence on the output of the church did not differ. For while they were often cast as single agents, their relationship was characterised by conflict and competition. (Carroll, 1981; Ingrams, 1980) It is necessary, therefore, to look at each of them individually, beginning with the lay leaders.

Deacon power and authority

For the first six years of its existence Cwmtref Baptist Church was run by its lay leaders. There were further periods during their history when they assumed control, the latest being from 1970 to 1973. Their right to take this responsibility has been granted by the church's constitution:

(17) That the officers have power to provide supplies for the pulpit when the church is without a pastor. In the choice of a minister, the officers shall consult the church in every matter, and do their utmost to preserve harmony and unanimity.

It is interesting to note in passing the concern about good relations being preserved. Note also the obligation to consult with the church.

But even when there is a minister in situ, the officers still retain a number of obligations:

(1) [They]...direct the church's affairs and prepare its business. (My emphasis)

(2) Call a special meeting when requested by two-thirds of the membership.

(12) Inquire into the cause of a members absenting themselves from divine worship and the Lord's Table...those without sufficient cause to be subjected to exhortation and reproof.

(13) Listen to complaints from one member about another if any member learn or be informed about gross inconsistency in another.

While these rules are based on the pattern established by earlier Baptist causes in Wales, they do bring into question the principle of congregational authority. In theory, the congregation

retains the prerogative to initiate policies and (eventually) to set the seal on all decisions, especially those of major consequence such as the selection of a new pastor. (Davidson et al, 1969:315) Yet at Cwmtref we saw how ALL the business of the church was being screened by the officers. They also carried the onus of finding a suitable ministerial candidate for the congregation to endorse.

At the heart of this contradiction is the Baptist's allegiance to participatory rather than representative democracy, which they see as incompatible with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. (Ingrams, 1981; Harrison, 1969) The deacon, therefore, does not represent the interests of his or her congregation but, in a sense, replaces the congregation. That is he, or she, IS that common believer who has access to the priesthood. It is through the office of deacon that the members, or a proportion of them, became fully involved -and fully responsible- for the running of their own affairs.

But the priesthood of all believers is not the only doctrinal imperative. The rules and principles governing the appointment and function of church officers has to accommodate the model provided by the scriptures. The Baptists accept that the office of Bishop, used in the early church and outlined in Acts and 1. Timothy, is synonymous with that of deacon.

(Jones, 1985:174) So while all members qualify on the grounds of being a 'common man' [or woman], those who are elected also have to display a quality described as 'spiritual competence'.

(Underwood, 1970:267) Here, then, are individuals who are chosen both because they are 'ordinary' and because they are special.

Furthermore, the processes and procedures used to elect then ordain them serves to elevate them above their fellow-members. At the same time, their position should not pose a threat to the authority invested in the membership in the form of the Church Meeting, or of the autonomy of the individual member.

Some of the dangers posed by the contradictory elements in this system appeared to be recognised in the early years. Deacons were elected for a fixed period of three years, so allowing the principles of participation and a priesthood of all believers to be followed more closely. In 1921, however, the decision was made to create deacons for life. This was taken, it was said, on the grounds of economic necessity: 'a church having heavy commitments cannot afford to have periodic diaconal balloting'. (Davies, 1980:37) Whatever the reasons, the consequence was a strengthening of what came to be a ruling elite, free of the most elementary democratic constraint; the ballot box. Officers of the church can now add to their initial qualifications the bonus of accumulated knowledge and experience, which Ingrams (1980) sees as the basis of authority in polities of this type (p.41). At Cwmtref four of the seven deacons serving at the start of this project had held office for over thirty years. (One died during the field research.)

These developments made it increasingly difficult to sustain the basic notion of the election of the 'common man'. In some ways this was always a problem for Cwmtref Baptist Church. From the earliest days there was a tendency to give preference to men, and later women, who in social terms at least were far from 'common'. Jones (1985) traces the change in the social status of the Baptist leadership from the end of the nineteenth century. He notes that

Cwmtref's first diaconate included a railway inspector(retired), a mining engineer, a headmaster, and a county councillor, all of them 'men of consequence in the town' (p.175) The congregation could count itself lucky that they were able to find leaders with both social and economic success and the personal attributes stipulated in the New Testament:

[Deacons should be]...grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre. Holding the mystery of faith in pure conscience... then let them use the office of deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things...

(1, Timothy, 3, 8-13. A.V.)

That early fortune has continued. At the start of this project the deacons included two men who had held office in the education field, a woman who had been charge of the family business, and another local businessman. When one deacon died and the secretary resigned, great efforts were made to persuade a county-councillor, who was not a full member of the church, to take the post of secretary. He refused that position but did agree to become a trustee. The pastor announced his appointment to the board of trustees during a Sunday morning service: 'I am delighted and honoured that County Councillor Colston, BA, J.P., has agreed to join the board of trustees'.

Serving alongside the present men and women of consequence were those with a lower social status. Three deacons had once been manual workers, including the secretary. When three new officers were elected in 1986, one was a former miner, another a housewife, the third a schoolteacher. It is not clear how this balance was achieved or whether it was pure accident. Electoral rules were

mainly concerned with ensuring that the successful candidates should receive a clear endorsement by the congregation (at least forty per cent of the votes cast). In my experience the procedures involved can be adapted to meet the needs of the church at any particular time. One election I was involved with took place when the number of serving deacons had fallen alarmingly so a full election was arranged. The names of all the eligible males in the congregation were listed on the ballot paper (the question of eligibility was decided by the diaconate of which I was the secretary). On another occasion the election arose because of the regulation which said that all church officers should be deacons. I was church secretary but not a member of the diaconate. So an 'election' was held with just one candidate. A few years later it was decided that women deacons should be elected. Because this was a novel idea at the time, there had to be a protracted process of canvassing and screening of candidates before the election could be called.

As the above examples show, the absence of detailed regulations does allow some behind the scenes manipulation. For the congregation, the main safeguard against unsuitable candidates that he or she must have a certain percentage of the votes cast. Hence, it was possible for the congregation to reject candidates who had been selected by the leaders. This happened at the election held at Cwmtref Baptist Church in 1986 when one of the candidates failed to gain the necessary percentage of votes. Arguments about the procedures involved (though not about the results) are rare simply because of their inspirational element. Lack of codification is balanced by the assertion that voting [and selection] relies on 'inspiration and intuition', and that the purpose is to reveal the will of God which is 'not subject

to procedures'. (Ingrams, 1980:43) This mixture of pragmatic action and spiritual inspiration conveys the aura which surrounds the office of deacon. A position which brings together practical skills and impeccable moral and spiritual qualifications.

One ingredient missing from the official prescription for that office is that of social status. The evidence for its importance was found more in the way the diaconate operated than in the way it was selected. It was noticeable at Cwmtref that the status of individual deacons within the congregation corresponded in many cases to their standing in the world at large. So out of the three deacons with over thirty years service two - those who had worked in education - were appointed to senior posts and were most often involved with the public duties of a deacon, such as leading in prayer, organising and supervising services and other activities. The other long-serving deacon - a manual worker - was usually seen doing the more mundane jobs; handing out hymn books, taking the collection, acting as door steward. Furthermore, one of the other two leaders was the only layperson to occupy the pulpit during the period of the field work, while his colleague had served as church secretary for a decade before being appointed church treasurer. He was also chairman of the board of trustees and the authorised registrar of marriages. This particular division of labour could simply be a question of 'horses for courses', with the difference in their positions reflecting their individual skills and experience. Yet, on the one Sunday when the pastor and most of the deacons were absent, the manual worker took charge. He led in prayer with great reverence and some eloquence, and gave an introduction and final vote of thanks to the preacher.

This division of labour within the diaconate, and the emergence of individuals with more power and influence than others, flies in the face of the notion of collective stewardship on which the structure of the diaconate is based, and of the spiritual and social equality implied in the calling. But there was strong evidence to indicate that even among this small executive of seven, there was at least one individual who enjoyed special privileges, Mr Davies who, as noted earlier, had held both of the main administrative posts of secretary and treasurer and who during the course of this investigation became senior deacon. He was also the congregation's 'historian in residence'. It was noticeable that few of his contemporaries addressed him by his Christian name, though this was the general practice. Indeed, one of the deacons was universally known by an affectionate 'nickname'. This was one measure of the sort of deference accorded Mr Davies, but I had even stronger evidence when I set-out to interview the church secretary.

Arrangements had been made to interview the secretary in the chapel vestry on a Thursday morning. When I arrived Mr Davies was sitting alongside the secretary, and evidently intended staying. Furthermore, it became clear that while my questions may be addressed to the secretary they would be answered by Mr Davies. On the few occasions when the secretary ventured an opinion he always checked with his colleague before relaying it to me. After forty-five minutes Mr Davies looked at his watch and said that the interview was now over. There were a number of reasons for this surprising tactic. One was that it was early on in the project and there was still some suspicion about my objectives. Another was that the secretary was new and

inexperienced, and was not even a deacon. Mr Davies, on the other hand knew more about the church than any of the other members.

But while there were sound reasons for this move, it did reveal the amount of authority held by Mr Davies. Further evidence came from the large number of respondents who when asked an awkward question would reply, 'Oh, Mr Davies is the best person to ask about that'. It was the secretary who gave the most telling testimony. He implied that since taking the post he had been involved in a number of disagreements with Mr Davies. One was over his attempt to engage a guest preacher without seeking the diaconate's approval. Another was when he was accused of using the wrong wording when he issued the invitation to the communion service. 'Some deacons are sticklers', was his comment on that occasion. At a later interview, just after his resignation, he complained about the continual criticisms he had faced and the negative attitudes taken by certain individuals.

This image of a reactionary and inflexible diaconate was not shared by everyone. One of the women deacons thought that the present group was both more tolerant and democratic than those she had known in her youth. She drew on the often portrayed image of the chapel despots of the past who administered harsh and public discipline on members who had strayed or 'fallen'. When pressed on this idea of a benevolent leadership she did suggest that even today there were limits to their tolerance though would not specify what they were.

The fact that the deacons and their position provoked mixed feelings could be foreseen. After all, the office itself is suffused with ambiguity. We have already noted how ordinary and extra-ordinary attributes are required of the office-holders. A further complication arose out of the tendency

to think of the office in subjective and personal terms. There was a general tendency to answer questions with an anecdote about prominent deacons of the past and, less often, about present officers. In drawing attention to these individual attributes (and failings) these members were undermining the idea that authority and responsibility should be granted to lay leaders on a collective basis; though this is expressed quite clearly in the way the diaconate was organised, and in its mandate to oversee all of the church's activities. (In my own church the diaconate was known as 'the oversight'.) So while there is need to be aware of the influence of individual leaders, due regard must also be paid to the ramifications of collective rule as experienced by the members and leaders of Cwmtref Baptist Church.

The phrase 'a ruling elite' was used earlier. This was a deliberate attempt to convey the impression gained of the diaconate by the worshipper in the pew. At Cwmtref the congregation was given a permanent reminder of the elevated status of the lay leaders. During Sunday services all of the deacons and other officers sat in the 'set fawr'. This was a semi-circle of wooden arm-chairs placed on a platform elevated above the long pews occupied by the congregation. When hymns were sung, the leaders turned to face the pews as if to symbolise their position as men and women 'set apart' from their fellow worshippers.

While the demarcation line between members and leaders is expressed in a similar fashion in many other nonconformist churches, Cwmtref Baptist Church have given it further emphasis. Privileged visitors to the church are given a guided tour of the photo-gallery housed in the vestry. Here they find a succession of

photographs taken from the 1920's to the present day, but all looking astonishingly similar. The composition does not vary; the minister stands at the centre while around him are arranged the officers of the day. Apart from changes in fashion the only difference between the first and the latest photograph is the presence of women deacons. Most of these photographs are reproduced in the latest official history (Davies, 1985). It also includes a 'roll of honour' marking the service of all those elected to the lay leadership.

There are, therefore, a number of reminders of the special role given to the diaconate. Some thought that its authority had been reduced since practices such as the disciplining of members have stopped. Certainly those very visible aspects of coercion and control are no more. In its place there is a more subtle system for reminding the members of their obligations, and for reinforcing the legitimacy of the leaders. A more extreme example was the church meeting called to remonstrate with the members for failing to support the prestigious Association pageant. We also noted earlier how the church secretary was made aware of the displeasure of his colleagues. While he was not forced to resign he claimed that it was the air of critical assessment emanating from the diaconate which was the decisive factor. One of the ordinary members told me of how he was subject to a similar type of insistent pressure.

He clashed with the officers when he attempted to use his artistic talents to serve the church. As an amateur artist and someone with a life-long love of the theatre he thought that special services could have a stronger visual component. He began to produce a series of paintings and some ingenious special effects to illustrate some of the Bible stories. Unfortunately

most of the lay leadership disapproved of such innovations. He said that he became embroiled in a long and frustrating battle which at one stage made him think of leaving the church. Eventually, the pastor intervened and he won a partial victory. One of the deacons complained quite vigorously to me about the detrimental effect his artistic efforts were having on the appearance of the chapel.

So even though their range of targets has been greatly diminished the officers can, when they are moved enough, exert a great deal of influence. In that last example we saw them resisting activities which ran counter to what they saw as the traditional attitudes and policies of Cwmtref Baptist Church. In so doing they were trying to preserve their own 'interpretive schemes' and express in a 'province of meaning' what they saw as the essential values and interests of this particular local church. (Bartunek, 1984:356) As Bartunek (ibid.) points out these 'provinces of meaning' are linked to the structural framework of an organisation. In this instance there was evidence of a correlation between the 'formal structure' of Cwmtref Baptist Church (The 'social and technical' arrangements through which the church achieves its tasks and maintains its 'output' (Watson, 1987:169).) and the province of meaning of its officers. It seems feasible, then, that those procedures which allowed the officers to supervise closely all aspects of the church's life would also enable them to produce and maintain an organisational culture and ethos which was in line with their own interpretive scheme. In view of the fact that the pastor needed the approval of the lay leaders, and their release of the necessary resources, before implementing his programme, there is good reason to posit that the chief influence on the response of this church to social

issues would have come from the diaconate. But as the evidence which follows, shows, that hypothesis is difficult to substantiate.

This research project took place during a period when the church's programme had not received the full support of the lay leaders. The pastor was seeking to establish an evangelistic perspective as the basis for a series of activities which would culminate in a full scale evangelistic mission to be held in April 1986. Mr Davies, the senior deacon, suggested that this went against the traditions of the church and the existing province of meaning. In his view as 'historian in residence' the church did not have much of an evangelical background. Moreover, attempts to revitalise the church through special missions had not been very successful. As I noted earlier Mr Davies was generally regarded as the gatekeeper of the church's traditions and reputation. But he was not the only officer to express reservations about the proposed mission. One of the women deacons said that she was nervous about the high emotional content of evangelical meetings. Given the presence of these dissenting voices how did the diaconate come to agree to the pastor's programme?

I asked one of my key informants among the diaconate this question. Her breakdown of the diaconate into individual votes was very illuminating. She was sure that the church secretary had been fully in favour. Two others, the teacher and the retired business woman, were reluctant to vote against the scheme, despite some strongly expressed reservations. As for Mr Davies, he was clearly against; 'He is like a stonewall, resisting any change, not wanting anything that sets a precedent'. Her own vote had been in favour of the pastor while the manual worker, she suggested, tended to

vote with what he saw as the probable majority.

This exercise suggests that support for the pastor was far from unanimous. As it happened, an actual vote was not taken simply because an amendment was not forthcoming. This in itself was significant. Not even Mr Davies was willing to mount direct opposition to the scheme. This accorded with the impression given by this informant, and my own experience, of an executive which was conscious of the need to act as a collective and give the congregation the full benefit of corporate leadership. But while the need to present a united front may have inhibited the dissenters, there were other factors at work.

One was that most of the reservations were over the means employed in this programme rather than its aim. Indeed its aim, recruiting new members, or 'saving souls', was supported wholeheartedly by all involved. According to their point of view, it was acceptable to support some rather dubious methods as long as the results would, eventually, justify that support. A further consideration was the need not to take a stand against the pastor. The mission was an integral part of the pastor's overall programme for the church and closely linked to his view of the church, and the world. To reject the mission, therefore, could be construed as a rejection of the pastor and may have made his position untenable. Furthermore, it would suggest that the lay leaders were seeking to undermine not just this pastor but the office he held, and the structural framework which bound the lay and full-time leaders together.

At this point it is necessary to break-off the discussion in order to provide an outline of the position of the pastor. As we consider the office itself, as well as the office-holders, we will uncover more of the key pastor-laity relationship. We will

also be returning to the barely disguised conflict over the evangelical mission and the insights it provides.

The Baptist pastor

We noted earlier that part of the authority wielded by the lay leadership had come from the growth of their duties and powers over time. Much the same point can be made when we assess the position of the pastor within a Baptist congregation. We cannot hope to appreciate it fully unless we view it in its correct historical context.

Before the nineteenth century the pastor was simply a member of the congregation who had been selected for special duties. In most respects he would have been indistinguishable from his fellow members. He would have had a similar style of dress, and worked for his living. But during the nineteenth century the first moves were made to develop the ministry as an 'order apart'. Their segregation from their fellow-members was marked by the use of a title -parch(reverend) or pastor- and they adopted a special uniform, the main distinguishing feature being a pure white cravat. (Bassett, 1977:191-2.)

By the second half of the nineteenth century much of the present pattern of ministry was established. Pastors were now full-time; 'living by the Gospel'. They were also mobile, moving from congregation to congregation in response to various 'calls'. (ibid.:200.) During this same period the ministers employed by the Welsh Baptist Union began to be subjected to special selection procedures and were educated and given vocational training at theological colleges. Some saw these developments as indicators of the professionalisation of the ministry, but one writer suggests that there is evidence from the eighteenth century of the pastor being accepted as one 'set apart' and ordained by God. (Jones, 1985:190.)

Certainly, by the time Cwmtref Baptist Church was established in the 1890's, it had become widely accepted that for a cause to flourish it needed its own full-time pastor. The first pastor called by this congregation was a local boy in so far as he was born and brought-up in the same county. He arrived at Cwmtref having already had some experience of the ministry and with a knowledge of the Welsh Baptist system. It turned out that he was the first in a long line of eminent Welsh-born pastors, a line that was not broken until 1973. Not that all the pastorates were completely successful. It was recorded that the second pastor had resigned due to ill-health after just eighteen months service: 'He spent himself out. He did not stay long enough to unpack his books'. (Davies, 1980:6.) Two of the pastors were involved with intense internal conflicts which led in each case to the resignation of a number of deacons. But it was the seventh pastor - the one who broke the line - that provides the most accessible example of the delicate nature of the relationship between pastor and lay leaders. It also gives some insight into why outright opposition to the pastor was such a rare phenomenon.

As this pastorate is examined there is need to be aware of the type and stature of the pastors who had served Cwmtref until this time. It must also be recognised that there are at least two versions of the incidents described. The recollections of the pastor concerned do not always coincide with those of my respondents, or of the published church histories. This difference in perceptions was, in fact, a contributory factor to the problems that surfaced during this pastorate.

The pastor concerned was recruited in rather unusual circumstances. Cwmtref Baptist Church had been without a minister

for over three years, an unusually long gap. One informant said it was the members not the officers who were becoming anxious. The deacons responded by contacting two experienced ministers, both of whom declined 'the call'. Eventually, another call was issued to a student of Spurgeon's Bible College. At first he had agreed to come to Cwmtref, but then withdrew on the advice of his college Principal. To make amends, the Principal recommended a former student, now a probationary minister. After completing the customary procedure of 'hearing' this new candidate, he was called and inducted on September 15, 1973.

Their new pastor was obviously very different in background and outlook to his predecessors. First of all he was English, and and a 'city boy'; the product of a Baptist Church in the Midlands. He admitted, that he knew little about the Welsh Baptist churches. Furthermore, he was very young and comparatively inexperienced. At just 24-years-old he was, he recalls, 'both the minister and the youngest member'. Many respondents thought that he lacked the essential 'experience of life'. They pointed-out that he had gone from school to university (to read chemistry), then on to Regent's Park, Oxford to read theology. It was this long career in education and his lack of work experience that led Mr Davies to refer to him as 'a bookman', as opposed to being a 'preacher'. A comparison based on previous pastors who while being 'bookmen' were also skilled orators.

In the church history compiled by Mr Davies (1980) there is a rather idiosyncratic review of this pastorate. It is headed 'Some events during the ministry of the Revd. Douglas'. The list includes the following: 'Offrex duplicator purchased for £98;

converted to North Sea gas; publication of Outreach newsletter; formation of youth club, reached over 250 members, no spiritual contact; resignation of church secretary; Boy's Brigade formed, youth club closed. (p.29) On the previous page it was reported, 'When the Revd Douglas became pastor of the church it was felt that a house on the new Cwmtref housing estate would provide a good ground for evangelism. (p.28)

Those few lines give many clues as to why there was a degree of tension and conflict simmering beneath the surface during this pastorate. If the charges implied in that list, and by respondents, were put into a more direct and brutal form they would read: He was English, lacked talent as a preacher, lived in a council house not a manse. He opened the church to local youngsters yet did not convert any of them. There was, therefore, a deep-seated incompatibility between the experience and approach of the pastor and that of the congregation and its leaders. Its most significant feature is illustrated in the title of the magazine he introduced, Outreach. It was this attempt to reach the community and open-up the church that caused the most problems. Cwmtref Baptist Church, even in the 1970's, was still something of a closed institution.

Not that any of these resentments surfaced during his ministry. The Revd Douglas confessed to being quite hurt by the comments published in the church history:

I can't say, looking back, that I felt any great tension between myself and the deacons and church officers. There was one moment of tension when Mr Davies resigned as church secretary but he and Norah [his wife] remained on the diaconate and he became treasurer... I think it was only with hindsight we realised any tension...

He did, however, recall the complaints about the wear and tear on the church property caused by the 'weight and number' of

the youth club. But he pointed out that the club already existed before he arrived. It was due to a combination of circumstances that it was turned from the traditional chapel youth club with table-tennis and devotions, into the town's main disco with a membership at one stage of over three-hundred. By this time he was running it single-handed. 'It was clear that the church could not understand the need to be involved'. One reason for this lack of understanding was revealed in a phrase used by Mr Davies during an interview. He said that the club had failed to bring 'any benefit to the church'. In other words it had not brought-in any new members. The benefits it might have given to the young people were, seemingly, less important.

There were other problems that were not recorded in the official documents of that time. These originated in the age and culture gap that existed between the pastor and his congregation. Many respondents recalled how young and 'green' he was, a combination that made his behaviour unpredictable, though they thought he was 'very nice'. One of the church officers was a little less complimentary. He gave an example of what he viewed as his eccentric behaviour. It concerned the pastor's wife's second pregnancy. This was officially announced to the congregation during the second 'members only' meeting held after Sunday evening services. After informing the members that she had conceived he went on, in subsequent weeks, to chart in detail the progress of her pregnancy. This, amongst other things, was seen as a lack of sensitivity to the traditions of the church which maintained the second meeting as either an opportunity for dealing with odd matters of business or, more usually, a means of reinforcing the message and 'appeal' given by the preacher. Such behaviour also clashed with the

congregation's province of meaning. However warm and friendly a pastor may be in private, on public occasions he was expected to convey that rather remote and dignified posture of 'the parson'. Furthermore, it was seen as his responsibility to maintain the serious and devotional atmosphere of worship, not destroy it with talk of his private life.

The Revd Douglas acknowledged that there was a 'clash of temperaments' and style. This he attributed, in part, to the differences between England and Wales [or more accurately, the Valleys and inner-city Coventry]. Though he was grateful for the love and encouragement he received from many of the members, he could not understand why so few of them had become his friends. 'No-one', he said, 'would ever drop-in for a casual chat'. This 'old-fashioned' notion of respect for the minister was, in his view, the reason why none of the congregation visited his wife when she was in a strange hospital for over two months. Another opportunity for observing these socio-cultural differences came when he was ordained into the ministry (at Coventry). A coach load of Cwmtref people turned-up. The Cwmtref folk were dressed in suits, the ladies with their hats. They found a much freer style of dress'.

One final illustration of the differences between this pastor and his flock concerns the issue of unemployment:

Not long after I came to Cwmtref, and moved into the manse on Eastern Road, I remember reading an article in the Sunday Times that placed Cwmtref in the top ten nationally for unemployment. However, in my time I can't say that the church was particularly involved or even aware of unemployment as an issue... It was not high on the church agenda, although to be fair, in 1972[sic] it didn't seem high on anyone's agenda and not many saw the prospect of three million unemployed.

But this lack of awareness extended to social issues in general.

And while the pastor described himself as 'theologically conservative' (a position modified by his stay at Regent's Park, Oxford), and his home church at Coventry as 'middle-of-the-road Baptist', he was more socially aware than his congregation and advocated the church's intervention into the life of the locality. Living in a council house, publishing a magazine, and working with the non-chapelgoing young were all elements of a ministry which received little support or understanding from the congregation and its leaders.

Yet, despite the rather fraught situation described in those reminiscences, the pastorate lasted for six years and they parted amicably. According to the Revd Douglas, it was his decision to leave. At the time talks were taking place about a scheme aimed at bringing all the Baptist congregations in the Valleys into a circuit system, similar to the Methodist's Mid Glamorgan Mission. As he was the only full-time minister in the Rhymney Valley at the time, he thought that his presence may have hindered the scheme so chose to leave.

The most interesting aspect of his pastorate, as far as this discussion is concerned, is the part played by the diaconate and its more powerful individual members. Though the evidence now available shows that they disapproved of the pastor's general approach, and many of his projects, their opposition was, on the whole, extremely muted. Even when it came to the vexed question of the youth club it was the pastor who decided to close it and replace it with the Boy's Brigade. Of course, that decision may have been provoked by a variety of subtle pressures exerted by the lay leaders, but this incident still serves to underline the 'structural' strength of the pastor. That is, despite the deep anxiety about the damage caused by the youth club, the pastor

had to be 'allowed' to make the decision needed to rectify the situation. This suggests a deference and respect for the office which can outweigh reservations about the individual office-holder. Thus the personal eccentricities and doubtful policies of the Revd Douglas were tolerated and his 'structural' position as 'the pastor' was never openly challenged. I will pick-up these observations again in the next section as I examine the position of the present pastor and his relationship with the lay leaders.

The Reverend Pryce

Cwmtref's pastor at the time of this research was in most respects the direct opposite to the Revd Douglas. He was Welsh; born in the valleys. And though this was his first full-time pastorate he had served two other congregations over a period of twenty years. When he was 'called' to Cwmtref he was already in his mid-fifties. His approach and methods were conventional enough to be labelled reactionary by some, though much in vogue in some sectors of the Christian Church. It is also worth noting that his recruitment was quite swift considering the problems encountered in finding a pastor in the early 1970's.

The Revd Douglas conducted his final service at Cwmtref on February 25, 1979. A year later the formal decision was made to look for a replacement. Within six months negotiations had begun with the present pastor. These were conducted on the congregations behalf by the treasurer and secretary. The 'call' was accepted provisionally on June 3 and confirmed by an emergency Church Meeting held on June 22. The induction service was held on November 8, 1980; the church's 84th anniversary.

(Davies, 1980:77.)

While this pastor matches the 'approved model' for Cwmtref

he does differ from his illustrious antecedents in two respects. First, he lacks their college education and specialised training. He made his way into the ministry via a denominationally approved correspondence course. However, this gave him the right to be called reverend and to a place on the Baptist Union's official list of ministers. The second difference lies in his proletarian background. Two of his predecessors had been 'sons of the manse', another had belonged to a wealthy family of farmers, but Martin Pryce was the son of a manual worker and had begun his own career as a butcher's boy. In fact, he stayed in the retail trade most of his life, reaching the post of Deputy Food Trades Officer of a local cooperative society. This secular career had not gone unnoticed in Cwmtref. One member of Central Hall always referred to him as 'the grocer'.

The progress made in his business career was matched by similar advances in his vocation as a minister of the Gospel. He pointed-out that for a long period he had two jobs and was a part-time student. Even so, his pastorates appeared to have been successful. Both of them lasted six-and-a-half years. Of the first he claimed; 'When I went in membership was twelve to thirteen. About five attending the morning service, fourteen to fifteen in the evening. When I left it was twenty-eight to thirty at each morning service, sixty to seventy in the evening'.

This success was one reason why he attracted the attention of Cwmtref's officers. They also appreciated his lively preaching style and the fact that he was the direct opposite of the over-educated, under-experienced pastor they had just lost. Given the reactions to the previous pastor, they may have regarded

his lack of paper qualifications as something of an advantage. But the pastor did not share this view. He constantly drew attention to the qualifications he did have, and the amount of effort they represented. He stressed, 'I sat the same exams as those sat by students in college. We are called Union ministers... a little 'u' alongside our name. That's the qualification as opposed to going to college or university, whatever.' During his sermons he often referred to the time he 'studied philosophy at Oxford' - a four-year correspondence course with weekend schools at Balliol College.

One reason for his defensive attitude was the high social standing of the congregation;

It was a high society church. You would have to have a degree to give the books out here... The deacons were all colliery managers, headmasters, teachers, and bank managers. I shuddered [when he received the call]... when I looked at the ministers. B.D.'s and the rest of it. Towered in the pulpit... They were giants.

That view was supported by the Revd Douglas who recalled the struggle he had to persuade a manual worker to stand for the post of secretary. Another Baptist minister said that when he was in Cardiff Baptist College, during the nineteen-fifties, it was the policy to send only the 'A' students to Cwmtref because it was rated one of the top churches in the Valleys. But, said, the Revd Pryce, things had changed:

I thought I couldn't maintain [a church] like that, not here... I've long since changed my mind. I've come close to everyone as individuals and people, and of course we can relate to each other.

The secretary made a similar observation;

I never thought a factory labourer would be secretary because they have always been of high position.

He also defended his pastor's lack of qualifications:

I have a friend who is a minister in north Wales. He once told a meeting of other ministers that his only qualification was City and Guilds in gas. But he added I am a BA -Born Again!

Then the pastor pointed to the qualities and experience he had which his predecessors lacked:

I have been in touch with people all my working life. Been able to share their problems, know their difficulties in their trades, their daily lives. Its lent itself, like Moses and Paul, to a ministry where you could kick-off straight away and relate.

His claim for the effectiveness of the common touch is not supported by some writers. They insist that the authority of the minister comes from his superior knowledge of religious affairs and his ability to display expertise that the congregation lacks. (Ingrams, 1981:121; Carroll, 1981:99.) Furthermore, this air of expertise is usually reinforced by the specialised training and education they have received. (Ingrams, loc.cit.) It was unexpected, therefore, to hear this pastor claim from the pulpit,

I'm surrounded by intellectuals. Many here know far more about the Bible than I do. I'm just a simple chap. that follows his heart.

(29.6.86.)

One of the intellectuals referred to admitted that he disagreed with the pastor's views on theology, especially his rather simplistic interpretation of the Bible. But he was full of praise for his other attributes. He saw his authentic local background as a advantage and praised the thoroughness of his

pastoral work. Taken together they made up for any intellectual shortcomings.

The theme of pastoral work was taken-up by other respondents. Many of them could remember the 'giants of the pulpit' so revered by the previous generation. Yet it was suggested that they lacked the Revd Pryce's appetite for pastoral work. It has been argued that this aspect of the ministry provides the means of creating a sense of obligation and gratitude toward the minister. (Ingrams, 1980:45.) Certainly, this pastor went to a lot of trouble to show his empathy and concern with individual members. One tactic was to list, by name, all those in the congregation who needed praying for, whether because of ill-health, a flight to Majorca, or whatever. This meant that at some services he would read out ten or fifteen names together with their 'problem'. He was also adroit at spotting visitors or casual attenders. I was given a public welcome, by name, at each service I attended even though I was present more often than some of the members.

His own view of the pastoral ministry was unequivocal:

I would rather be out there visiting than preaching. I would like to think it's a question of priorities. The way I work it out is that those who are seriously ill or housebound are top of the list. Regular attenders, a visit every two or three years because I see them anyway. They don't have to tell me the problem, I'm in with them and I've got my ear to the ground constantly... I've got to know them so well that they are part of my life.

This high work-rate had been noticed by many of the members. 'He's always on the road... Difficult to catch him on the telephone'.

There was also evidence of the element of obligation.

One of his most forthright supporters was anxious to place on record her debt of gratitude to the pastor, and his wife. They arrived at Cwmtref when she was ill with grief after the sudden death of her husband. As a result of the support they gave her at the time she now regarded herself as 'one of [their] family'. The pastor had encouraged her to take a more public role in church life. It was her commitment to the church (and him) that had prevented her moving from Cwmtref to live with her daughter. Unlike most of the other respondents she always referred to the pastor as Martin, never the Reverend Pryce or, the more usual, 'pastor'.

It was this respondent that drew attention to another of his attributes; the ability to preach simple yet powerful sermons. She said that many of the previous ministers 'used to preach at you, Martin doesn't'. Other respondents agreed that his preaching style had brought a refreshing change. One or two, however, (the intellectuals!) described it as unstimulating. Certainly, his style had been carefully developed and showed a relentless appetite for lurid colloquialisms. Among the selection I noted was a reference to the call of the first disciples as a move from 'catching smelly fish to deal with the hearts and minds of men and women'. On two occasions he gave a detailed description of how Jesus had washed the 'dirty, smelly feet of his disciples'. His most memorable epigram, however, was 'The difference between a holy kiss and an unholy one is two minutes'.

It is difficult at first to equate this informal approach with the notion of the pulpit as a 'power forum', and the use of preaching to 'define issues and solutions [and] give

public warning to dissidents'. (Ingrams, 1980:44) Yet while his commitment to 'preach the Gospel' precluded the discussion of topical issues, it did perform the function identified by Ingrams in that it allowed him to promote a particular view of the Bible, of the role of the local church, and of the obligations laid on individual church members. So the Bible was consistently presented as 'The Word of God' and, therefore, beyond question and open to just one (literal) interpretation. 'Real Christians' (a recurring motif) were those who attended services regularly and were 'willing witnesses' to the Gospel; willing to testify in public that is.

As far as the local church was concerned it was its capacity for self-regeneration that was its most important characteristic. The church brings men and women to Christ. As a consequence they join the church and, in turn, help bring other men and women to Christ - and His church. Overlying this perspective was a theology that reduced concepts such as Satan or, heaven to physical phenomena. At the same time, those parts of the Bible that relate to everyday life were religionized and presented in abstract terms. Hence, a sermon on Christian citizenship was used to show that Christians are really citizens of heaven. Their subsidiary role as citizens of the world was 'merely the opportunity to live a Godly existence and show others how different we are'.

There was, then, a clear attempt to 'define issues' for the congregation. Or, at least, to encapsulate all issues in a single prescription; bring people to Christ. But he also used the pulpit to reinforce his own authority and the legitimacy of his position. Seeing that he was the appointed 'Messenger of the Lord' how could his views be challenged? More than once he stated that

any criticisms of his preaching would be invalid because all he was doing was 'preaching the word'.

As well as these claims based on his 'divine calling', the pastor was able to establish territorial rights which enabled him to block any attempts to present an alternative point of view. Unlike many of his fellow Baptist ministers, he was responsible for just one congregation. And, also unlike many of his colleagues, he eschewed the normal month's vacation (taken in August) in favour of a week or fortnight in the Spring. Neither could he be accused of abusing the granting of 'free' Sundays when many ministers serve and get paid by another church. In his own words he was at Cwmtref, and occupying the pulpit, 'ninety-five per cent of the time'. When he did take his annual holiday, his replacements were carefully vetted by the diaconate. In the unlikely event that a 'renegade' should gain access to the pulpit, he could not cause too much damage in the time available.

It has been further suggested that this control of the pulpit is a useful weapon for diffusing opposition. Those who support the pastor are rewarded by being given access to the pulpit, those who oppose him are denied it. (Ingrams, 1981:124.) At Cwmtref, such rewards are restricted to the reading of the lesson or leading in prayer. The Revd Pryce claimed that under his pastorate the level of participation in worship by members had increased. He mentioned in particular his innovation of allowing lay leaders to take the communion service while he, the pastor, sat in the pew. This experiment was not repeated during the fourteenth-month fieldwork period. Participation by members was, in fact, extremely rare and usually involved visitors. Most of these were relatives of members who had gone

away to college or university, underlining his desire to be associated with those he called 'academics' or 'intellectuals'.

He had found another way of building support for his particular approach. Part of his programme for the church was the production of qualified lay preachers who, he suggested, could become his official substitutes when he was absent. Two members had been recruited for this scheme. Both of them said they were slightly ambivalent about the project, but that they were persevering because of the support given to them by the pastor. Their 'training' was by means of the Baptist Union's lay preacher's correspondence course, with the pastor as their approved tutor. It was noticeable that both of these students shared the pastor's fundamentalist approach. One of them told me the story of a foreign holiday where his sole companion had been 'the Lord'. On another occasion he was involved in a serious car accident. 'Just before the moment of impact I heard the Lord say "Don't worry, I will take care of you" and, miraculously, we all escaped unscathed'.

While the pulpit was an important means of imposing the pastor's views and attitudes on the congregation, there were other activities which could be used for similar ends. Mention was made earlier of the subsidiary organisations. The pastor had added to these what was called a 'house fellowship'. This involved a member acting as host to a group of people which, hopefully, would include some non-members. The host or hostess was expected to lead the meeting but the content was determined by the pastor. He would provide a booklet, or perhaps an audio-

cassette which could be used to introduce the selected topic. Invariably these were evangelistic products, mainly from the Billy Graham organisation, and the topics were almost exclusively 'religious' - prayer, faith, worship and so on.

Another mid-week activity was the Wednesday evening Bible Study. This was led by the pastor and organised in a similar way to his preaching programme. That is he embarked on a methodical plod, chapter by chapter, through a chosen book of the Bible. This was Bible study rigidly defined in that it was an examination of the text with no attempt made to bring out any relevance it may have for current issues. As already noted, he chose to ignore the extensive amount of study material produced by the Baptist Union or the ecumenical organisations. When he did use 'outside' material it was from a body of literature concerned with church growth, originating again from the evangelical movement and with a strong American bias. Most of the case studies he quoted were of congregations who had experienced spectacular growth as a result of more intensive Bible study and use of prayer, as well as house groups and high profile personal evangelism.

We have seen, therefore, how the pastor was able to exert authority over his congregation and lay leaders by his control of the debate on questions of theology and doctrine. In doing this he did, in fact, lay claim to 'specialised knowledge' though as the result of inspiration rather than training or education. Support for his stance was enhanced by the sense of obligation and respect engendered by his pastoral work. These elements of clergy control have been identified by Carroll (op.cit.:102.).

But he goes on to suggest that the modern [American] clergyman is also expected to have knowledge and skills in the fields of 'sociology, psychology, and organisation management'. (idem.) The Revd Pryce would, no doubt, add philosophy to that list. But it is the function of organisation management that has most relevance for this discussion. For even in Britain the clergy are expected to take on the role of organisers and administrators. (Ranson et al, 1977:15.) The Revd Pryce seemed to have been active in this area of the church's life. It was because of him that the Men's Own had been revived and the house groups and mid-week Bible study become regular activities. Other changes included the improvement of the Sunday School under the new title of the Junior Church and the use of the Thursday Coffee Morning as part of the church's witness. The New International Bible had been bought as the version to be used at all services, while chorus sheets and 'Sankey's' (Sacred Songs and Solos) were used almost as often as the Baptist Hymnary. Then there was the 'friendship drive', the replacement of the ink-duplicator with a photo-copier, and the traditional oak notice-board being eclipsed by an eight-foot sheet of hardboard with 'coming attractions' advertised in day-glo colours.

Most of those changes serve to facilitate the pastor's policy of aggressive evangelism. While his use of the pulpit helped justify these innovations, they still required some administrative ability; particularly in circumventing the conservative elements among the diaconate. In this respect the organisational structure worked to his advantage. According to the church rules he automatically assumes the post of president

of the church and chairs all Church Meetings. In effect he is president of the company, working with the secretary to draw up business agendas and having most decisions referred to him.

To a large degree, therefore, he was the central pivot about which the Sunday by Sunday running of the church revolved. Even so, his position vis-a-vis the lay leadership was often ambiguous. In my experience the minister was regarded both as a professional advisor and as a paid employee. Thus at one point he would be asking the diaconate to approve his work, at another they would be asking him for guidance and advice. While there was a risk involved in this confusion of roles, it did mean that the minister was the central figure at meetings of the diaconate, and that the agenda was dominated by matters in which he was directly involved. Many of the ministers I knew were adept at turning this key structural position to their advantage. I was not given access to the meetings of the diaconate at Cwmtref but, as I reported earlier, visits to the Men's Group gave me some indication of the management skills of this particular pastor.

But it would be wrong to regard this pastor's ability to implement his programme as simply the product of administrative skills. At the heart of the diaconate's acquiescence lay the whole notion of the pastorate as understood and practised by this congregation. Two interrelated elements need to be stressed. The first is that aspect of his authority which may be called structural. Little of this stems from the formal structure of the church which, as we have seen, seeks to invest most of the power and authority in the laity. So this church's constitution, and the other codified administrative procedures being used, contributed little to the authority of the pastor. But they were juxtaposed with a series of practices and attitudes which appeared to give him (or

her) both authority and power. Thus we found that this pastor was able to command the pulpit, the administration of the sacraments was seen to be 'in his gift', auxiliary groups were willing to accept his right to direct their programmes.

Many of these practices were so entrenched that they were difficult to distinguish from the formal structures. Nevertheless, their origins, and continued legitimacy, can be traced to the culture of this particular congregation, and of the Baptist Church as a whole. The evidence quoted from Bassett (1977) earlier showed how the structural procedures which now appear set in stone were the result of a modification in that province of meaning on which the pastor's position was predicated. Thus the pastor as 'common man', virtually indistinguishable from the rest of the flock, is now a forgotten concept. In its place we have a situation where deference to the elevated status of the office itself allows office-holders, no matter how ill-equipped, to claim legitimacy and respect.

This would appear to contradict Carroll's (1981) view that in congregational politics 'such authority that ministers have... is essentially personal authority...' (pp 104-5) He compares this with the 'authority of the office' which he defines as 'a reflection of the religious group's concern to protect the sanctity of its tradition, preserving the charisma and teachings of its founders by institutionalizing them into an office' (idem). Yet his definition shows how difficult it is to separate the two. What he refers to as the authority of the office is itself often a reflection of the personal authority of the original office holders. A point illustrated by the pastorate of the inexperienced Revd Douglas which can only be explained through the notion of authority of office. A clearer impression

of the force behind this authority of office can be gained through a more detailed examination of the concept of a special priesthood.

Clearly, there is a contradiction to be observed when an organisation built on the principle of the priesthood of all believers, allows a special priesthood to emerge. The fact remains that individuals were not just called apart from their congregations, but were also placed above them. (Ingrams, 1981; 121) Thus 'the call' led to them being 'licenced and ordained after a screening and acceptance procedure carried out by their peers'. (idem) Not far behind came the acceptance of their special uniform and title, their admission into professional groupings and specialist careers, and the licence granted for them to perform tasks from which the laity were excluded (e.g. weddings, funerals). These elements alone are sufficient to give the office of pastor a range of authority and powers which exist independently of the attributes of any individual office-holder.

Indeed, it is possible to see how what might be called the trappings of the office would appeal greatly to a man such as the Revd Pryce who was born into a much lower social position. It was odd, therefore, that he seemed so willing to eschew many of the inherited symbols of his office. During the large number of services I attended he wore his clerical collar just once. Even then, he apologised to the congregation, explaining that it was needed because he found it easier to gain admission to hospitals outside visiting hours when he was wearing it. And even though he was keen to establish his right to the title reverend, he rarely used it. His personal Christmas greeting handed out to all the worshippers was signed 'Yours in Christ, Martin A. Pryce'. There was also a notable absence of those little ceremonial

touches such as having the congregation stand when minister and deacons processed from the vestry.

In many ways, he was as anxious as the Revd Douglas had been to undermine the traditional image of the pastor as a prestigious, yet remote figure. The fact that he was more successful than his predecessor was due largely to his age, background, and Welsh pedigree. His ebullient and gregarious style also helped, and he was more than willing to shed the traditional pastor's 'uniform'. On most Sundays, therefore, the dark pin-stripe gave way to the light-coloured suits and bright ties favoured by television evangelists. Then, he would sometimes replace the sermon with an intimate chat delivered from the 'big-seat' rather than the pulpit. When addressing the Junior Church (Sunday School) he used the avuncular approach. At the Men's Group he became 'one of the boys', swapping stories about the old days. On these occasions he drew heavily on his working-class background. He was wont to suggest that his own progress from butcher's boy to minister of a 'top chapel' was analogous with the bid for 'spiritual mobility' made by those who gave their lives to Christ.

This appears to be an attempt to 'revise the provinces of meaning, the interpretive schemes which underpin the constitutive structuring of [this] organisation'. (Bartunek, 194:356) Indeed, we can see how this pastor's bid to change perceptions of his own role and behaviour, were married to a desire to modify the congregation's perception of the local church and its policy and attitudes. Yet these changes had not produced any noticeable modification in the structural framework of the church, either second-order (fundamental) or first-order (incremental). The church's administrative procedures remained intact; the relative positions of lay leaders and pastor were much as they had been

since the church was founded, while some of the comments made about the 'modern' methods embraced by this pastor suggested that the organisational culture had only been marginally altered.

If this was the case, it would mean that this particular local church, which had not experienced any fundamental structural change at either a formal or informal level, was, nevertheless, producing an output much different to that seen at almost any other period in its history. The evidence of the previous pastor and of key informants suggests that the stance of this congregation had been resolutely 'middle-of-the-road', thus avoiding the interventionist social orientation of the liberals and the ultra-religious exclusivity of the conservatives. Now, however, (at least in the short-term) its output was in line with the conservative evangelicals. Any doubts about that appeared to have been dispelled with the special mission; its hand-clapping gospel songs, its electric guitars, and its charismatic evangelist. How could such a moderate, centrist organisation sanction, and become involved in, what some would regard as a violent swerve to the right?

To answer that question we have to return to the activities of the Revd Pryce and the notion of clergy authority. One curious aspect of this pastorate was the ambivalence revealed by the pastor himself. For much of the time he seemed determined to completely embrace the role of evangelist and so contradict the traditional image of 'the parson'. However, this did not prevent him drawing out of the deep well of ministerial status and respectability left by his antecedents. No one passing the church building could fail to see on the notice board his name and full title 'Reverend Martin A. Pryce'. Moreover, his folksy anecdotes and references to his humble beginnings were more than balanced

by almost weekly references to his previous pastorates, the hours of intellectual labour required to produce sermons, his education (at Oxford!) and training for the ministry, his friendship with other ministers and denominational leaders. When being interviewed he stressed the great demands being made on him to give (specialised) help to families and individuals.

He was, therefore, using his personal authority and the authority of his office to further his cause despite the fact that they presented contradictory images. So rather than destroy the interpretive schemes of his congregation he had distorted them. They now had two alternative perceptions of the office of pastor, both being expressed by the same person. Should they accept and embrace the pietistic, dignified clergyman, or the down-to-earth man of the people who told jokes from the pulpit? Some found it natural to refer to him as Martyn, for many others he was still 'the pastor', while a few always called him the Reverend Pryce. Given this high level of ambivalence and uncertainty we can see why this pastorate had not yet produced any fundamental structural modifications. The attitude of an influential minority of the diaconate to flamboyant evangelicals, suggests that the Revd Pryce would not have been called in the first place if this had been his dominant image. As it was, he could draw on both of these disparate images to gain approval for his programme. Friends and opponents alike were seduced by his energy, enthusiasm and charm. At the same time, they could recognise the characteristics of a Baptist pastor; a man 'called apart'. They were fortunate to have found someone who could provide the accessibility of the new breed of ministerial recruits without undermining the dignity and piety which had been the hallmark of earlier pastors.

Along with those considerations we must include the question of recruitment and the central place it occupied in the objectives of Cwmtref Baptist Church. Ingrams (1981) suggests that ministers are given the prime responsibility for recruiting new members. (p.44) It appears that one reason for calling the Revd Pryce was his success at attracting new members to his previous churches. In a sense, therefore, he had a mandate which specified the goals but not the means to be employed. Furthermore, the approach proposed by this pastor was clearly directed at recruitment and avoided the charge, made against the Revd Douglas, of making contact with non-Christians yet failing to bring any benefit to the church. Whatever the drawbacks of personal evangelism, by 'bringing people to Christ' it was also likely to bring them to Christ's church.

In this area of the church's life, the pastor could claim superior knowledge and experience over his lay colleagues. As one of the deacons pointed-out, the Church had paid due regard to gaining new members, but had tended to rely on conventional recruitment methods. For most of its history it relied on the Sunday School, youth movements like Christian Endeavour, and the gains from being an established family church. It was around the end of the 1950's that they came to realise that these methods were no longer reliable, though the full effects had only been recently been felt as the present congregation and its leaders began to age. The result was a huge gap between the young members of the Junior Church and the bulk of the congregation who were late middle-aged and older. It was the shortage of able-bodied (and high-earning) members in the late teens to early forties age range which had led some respondents to talk in terms of an impending crisis.

It was noticeable that when this subject was broached the terms of the debate were changed. When talking about the evangelical campaign in general terms the pet phrases were 'saving souls' and 'bringing men to Christ'. But questions about the future of the church itself revealed that most of the concerns were practical. This was to be expected given the strong attachment expressed for the building. I lost count of the number of times I was told that 'their' chapel seated one-thousand and was the largest Baptist church in the immediate vicinity. Pride and anxiety about its future were often intermingled, as were the spiritual aims of the church and its economic imperatives. One of the official histories illustrates this. Under a certain pastor it was recorded (in the same paragraph) that 'thirty three people were baptised' and 'flourescent[sic] lighting in the kitchen and schoolroom had been installed'. Davies(1980:24)

For others it was the number of people attending Sunday services, as much as the condition of the building, which was an indicator of the church's health and prosperity. On some Sunday mornings when I attended there were less than thirty people scattered through the thousand seater sanctuary. Older people drew attention to the inter-war period when congregations were large and the recorded membership was around four hundred. Now, in the early 1980's, it had sunk below three figures for the first time ever. While these historical comparisons added fuel to their pessimism, no one attempted to compare their situation with that of nonconformist churches in similar circumstances. When this is done Cwmtref's membership of almost ninety and an average Sunday evening congregation of over fifty looks far more promising. One recent survey found that average congregations for all churches in this area of south-east Wales is thirty-five, while

over seventy-seven per cent of the Protestant churches have fewer than fifty members. (Brierly and Evans, 1983:29)

Fears about their financial situation were also rather exaggerated. True, the situation was finely balanced. The average weekly collection for 1986-6 was £150 while the pastor's recommended stipend was £6,325 plus expenses of £660. Other income came from investments, fund-raising ventures, and personal donations and bequests. It was, as many respondents pointed-out, the threat posed by the possible loss of the elderly and often better-off members, that was leading to talk of a possible 'balance of payments' crisis.

These practical considerations were enough in themselves to make the prospect of a successful recruitment campaign very appealing. But there were other more subjective aspects to the fall in morale. One of the women deacons put her own feelings into words. The decline in the fortunes of the chapel had affected the whole of her life. She had been brought up in Cwmtref, and her family were well-known business people. She recalled the time when all of her friends and most of her neighbours belonged either to a church or chapel. 'Now I am almost afraid to mention that I go to chapel because I don't know what the reaction will be'. The resulting sense of isolation had been intensified by the knowledge that many of her contemporaries who, like her, had been through Sunday School and Christian Endeavour before entering the church itself, now 'never go near the place.' And while some still supported the church financially she found it difficult to forgive the lonely walk to services, or those cold Sunday mornings when the sanctuary seemed almost deserted.

Here, then, was a church which was becoming increasingly

preoccupied with the question of recruitment. It was acknowledged that financial security, the upkeep of the building, and a full programme of activities, required a large, loyal and active membership. People, therefore, were the prime resource; the raw material essential for the production and reproduction of the organisation and its plant. It could be argued that this church was too labour-intensive and was 'over-manned'. Why did they require (by custom not rule) a minimum of seven sitting on the diaconate? Why did they not subscribe to some of the more imaginative fund-raising schemes used by charities and the like rather than rely on their own internal resources? Whatever the reasons for their reliance on what may be seen by some as outdated forms of organisation and fund-raising, it did result in increased pressure on the pastor.

The Revd Pryce recognised that even for evangelical ministers 'saving souls' is not enough, particularly if these 'souls' choose not to become members of his congregation:

...[I am] trying to persuade the church that its mission is only one mission[sic] -people for Christ, salvation. If that is lost you have a long, long job... This is what we are fighting. To put the Church right then -whoosh- out to the community.

Both House Groups and the 'friendship campaign' were seen as part of the recruitment drive:

If we can bring new Christians into our services. If they can get the feeling of a House Group where there is friendliness and comfort and relaxing[sic], they get the feeling of belonging to something that's O.K.... As I said from the pulpit, if you bring them to a full service and subject them to a forty-minute sermon, it's hard going. They don't come again...'

He admitted that one reason why it had been decided to revive the Men's Group was the chronic shortage of men in the church. Once again he expressed the hope that the informal setting would help acclimatise prospective members to the rigours of Sunday worship.

He was also aware of the other opportunities for recruitment which were open to ministers, such as wedding and funeral services which involved non-churchgoers:

Some ministers turn weddings and funerals into preaching services. That's all wrong, must be personal and homely... I was in a home last week, never been to church in their lives as far as I know... but when they were selecting hymns for the forthcoming funeral... [I] had a little chance to talk to them about the church without throwing it at them.

These subtle and sensitive attempts at evangelism were due for a shake-up once the campaign, scheduled for April 1986, was under way

The pastor suggested that the idea for the campaign came from the trip (arranged by him) to see one of the Billy Graham evangelical rallies held in 1985. This event may have gained some support for such methods from among the church members, but for the pastor it merely confirmed the validity and effectiveness of his personal attitude and beliefs. These were displayed for all to see whenever he led a service of worship. There was the unapologetic allegiance to fundamentalist doctrine, the fondness for the more extrovert styles of worship which meant gospel songs rather than traditional hymns, together with long, emotive prayer sessions, and ultra-dogmatic sermons. Such a style fitted in naturally with the practices advocated by the church growth movement, and evangelicals such as Billy Graham.

The view that church growth is connected to conservative theological attitudes has been questioned by Perry and Hoge (1981:222-3) But the members of Cwmtref Baptist Church had no reason to query the pastor's claims for these methods. He underlined his argument at every opportunity, frequently reading out the amazing statistics about once derelict churches who now had to extend their building and hold extra services to cater for the influx of new members. His case was helped by the common belief that the local pentecostal church was flourishing, 'much more lively than ours', was a frequent comment. And those who had made the trip had seen the long line of 'converts' which are a feature of large scale evangelical campaigns, such as Billy Graham's.

Given the amount of evidence in favour, it was difficult for any of the members to mount a convincing opposition. Mr Davies, senior deacon and treasurer, emphasised the high cost of the campaign (£500 in evangelist's fees alone). But treasurers are expected to make that kind of comment. One of the other deacons, the one who had made the remark quoted earlier about guitars not 'belonging in chapel', was anxious about other aspects of the evangelical style. She admitted that she could be regarded as out of touch with 'this modern generation'. But other respondents shared her reservations about the aggressive nature of 'personal evangelism' which would entail all of the members being involved in the door-by-door canvassing planned for the run-up to the campaign. Yet, all of the doubters quickly conceded that if the end result would be just one addition to the church, then the cost and the doubtful methods would be justified.

Internal structures and processes

This chapter has ventured into Cwmtref Baptist Church. From the position adopted by the researcher, as a participant in

the life of the congregation, we have viewed the people and processes and organisational arrangements of this local church. The theoretical model adapted from Watson(1987) led us to look, initially, at the formal constitutional arrangements which give authority and 'oversight' to the lay leadership; legislative power and final authority to the membership via the Church Meetings; but appear to restrict both the power and responsibility of the pastor.

The data, however, suggested that these formal structures were not producing the organisational processes and social relations for which they were designed. For while the lay leadership retained much of their authority, and the church remained loyal to the principle of the autonomy of the congregation, the pastor had emerged as the most powerful and influential of these agents. We looked at various aspects of clergy power and authority but, in broad terms, it was explained through the notion of organisational culture. (Watson, 1987) Hence, the growth through time (and at various levels) of an ethos which regards the Baptist pastor as the dominant and central figure in the local church.

We observed the effectiveness of these informal structures and processes over two pastorates. Both the young Revd Douglas, and the experienced Revd Pryce, were able to draw on the legitimacy which came from the office they held and the church's perception of it. But the Revd Pryce in particular had extended his influence through some energetic agent activity. His efforts meet Hoyle's(1982) definition of micro-politics, 'those strategies by which individuals and groups in organisational contexts seek to use their resources of power and influence to further their interests'. (quoted in Ball(1987:18) Much of the micro-

political activity in this instance was directed at the congregation's existing 'province of meaning'. (Bartunek, 1984)

If the Revd Pryce was to succeed in establishing his own programme and completely legitimize his own position, he had to change the way this church saw the role and function of the local church, and of the office of pastor. His attempts at meeting this objective could be observed in diverse situations and different levels. Hence his cultivation of relationships with individuals and groups, and his control of the pulpit.

But while it was suggested that the pastor had some (provisional) success in changing the interpretive schemes of his fellow agents, and the province of meaning held by the congregation, it had not resulted in the expected modification of the structure. (ibid.) This may have been due to the fact that this investigation took place during a transitional period when what may be called the old and new interpretive schemes were being utilised. Indeed, it is possible to foresee such modifications if, and when, the pastor succeeds completely. This could involve, for example, a reduction in the authority of the diaconate. As it was, Revd Pryce was grooming someone who was not a church officer to become a lay preacher, and was using others to lead pre-worship 'sing-alongs' of gospel choruses. A more important precedent was set by allowing an evangelist, who was not a Baptist, to lead the special campaign and so break the embargo on the use of the pulpit.

The analysis of these internal processes, and of the interaction between formal and informal structures, and agent activity, gives an insight into how this church was able to select inputs and convert them into its own outputs. In this respect, it was the pastor who carried-out most of the

mediation tasks. Hence, the congregation's acceptance of inputs from the evangelical and church growth movements while those from the denomination and ecumenical movement tended to be filtered out. The immediate consequence was that social and political issues were crowded-off the agenda. To put it at its most elementary, this church was unlikely to produce a response to these issues if they had not entered 'the system' as inputs. While this observation is justified it should not allow us to ignore the importance of the internal processes and relations described in this chapter. The ability to set the agenda and filter-out unwanted inputs, is the product of a complex interaction between the organisational structure of this church, its informal processes and organisational culture, together with the micro-political activity of key agents or interest groups.

7: The internal organisation of Central Hall

A report called 'The ministry of the whole people of God', discussed by the 1986 Methodist Conference, suggested that,

The Church is most truly what God wants it to be when each Christian, with the help of the Christian community, discerns, develops, and uses the Spirit's gifts in ministry.

(Link, Autumn 1986:4)

That move nearer to the principle of the priesthood of all believers was prompted, in part, by the growing logistical problem posed by declining societies, and the resultant larger circuits. But it also reveals a certain sensitivity to criticisms about the polity of the Methodist Church. Wilson (1982) described it as autocratic, while Deeks (1985) noted its 'over-dependence on the ordained ministry'. (p.8) Because of this there has been a 'suffocation of intelligent participation and partnership from lay men and women'. (Campbell, 1985:42) The result is a situation where 'the clergy...lead and control and [the] laity...follow and obey (or acquiesce)'. (Clark, 1984:28)

These assertions about clergy control have less force when applied to Central Hall, Cwmtref. We noted earlier how structural changes, inside and outside the society, had led to a more balanced relationship between the minister and the lay leaders. The most noticeable aspect of these changes was the near breakdown of the formal, structural procedures. In this chapter we will be extending our enquiry to the informal structures; the culture of Central Hall. (Watson, 1987)

We also need to take account, as in the last chapter, with the amount and effectiveness of the agent activity taking place. While the list of competing agents is usually limited

to the lay leaders and the minister, it was noticeable that the Church Council, the organisation which brings laity and clergy together, was itself capable of agent or interest group activity. There was not, however, an equivalent mechanism for member participation. Unlike the Baptist Church, the membership as a group had no role in the decision-making process.

Another obvious difference in the two studies was that social issues such as unemployment were high on Central Hall's agenda. The field research took place at a time when there was a great deal of conflict over the future of the Hall, which was linked to the society's perception of its relationship with the local community and its attitude to socio-political questions. So, again, an existing province of meaning was being challenged. (Bartunek, 1984)

The fact that unemployment should appear on the agenda despite the lack of interest in the denominational debates on the same issue, is in itself significant. If this was an environmental input and it did not come from the society's religious environment, where did it come from? The answer to that question owes more to the internal polity of Central Hall, and the activity of its agents, than to the power of any particular environmental influence. It is necessary, therefore, to describe the role and structural position of the agents concerned.

The Minister

The problems of societies like Central Hall were one of the main concerns of the report mentioned at the start of this chapter. Here was a society which despite (or because of) innovations such as the Mid Glamorgan Mission was desperately short of ministerial aid. This shortage had left something

of a leadership vacuum due, in part, to the failure of successive ministers to 'encourage local indigenous leadership to flourish'. (Deeks, 1985:7) That assessment assumes that the ministers of Central Hall had been given both the opportunity and ability to train and develop lay leaders. But then views about the role of the minister in Methodism are full of such assumptions.

The respondents from Central Hall shared in this rather exaggerated view of ministerial power. Indeed, while many of the Baptist anecdotes featured deacons, at Central Hall the stories were all about ministers of the past. One of the oldest members had clear memories of the days before Central Hall was built but, like her contemporaries, her recollections were dominated by Leon Atkin, the 'Hall's' first minister. For many, the days before Leon Atkin were little more than pre-history.

There was also a difference in the tone of voice and style of speech used by the members of these respective churches when talking about their ministers. It can be summed-up in the way Baptist members spoke of the pastor while the Methodists referred to our minister, even when speaking critically of the individual concerned. Their attitude, therefore, involved a rather possessive pride and sense of attachment which suggested that relations between minister and members was both closer and more personal than that of the Baptist members and their pastor. Yet, in terms of organisational structure, the opposite should have applied. The Baptist pastor was with his flock ninety-five per cent of the time. Central Hall shared their minister with nine other societies and a circuit team ministry, and his personal appearances were rationed to about two per month.

Even so, whenever I asked someone to outline the history

of Central Hall they invariably used their memories of individual ministers as chapter headings. Mrs Riden, for example, recalled the minister who had taken 'one hundred and sixteen young people to Port Eynon camping. I always remember camp-fires by the beach -a wonderful time'. But, inevitably, she began with the legendary Leon Atkin:

He was really modern...would talk about concertina stockings and girls wearing lipstick...He would fill the Central Hall with his preaching...He was an outstanding man.

We also had the Reverend Reginald Barrow who specialised in pantomimes. He had a marvellous drama group...

Most ministers were English, except the Reverend Thomas. He was a good minister...

One fault with all of them, they don't visit. In the last twenty years this has been the case. Didn't use, to be, they always went around [the members]...

Note the emphasis given to social activities as opposed to the Baptist's preoccupation with 'saving souls' and increasing resources. As far as this particular respondent was concerned the fortunes of the Hall were very much tied to the minister. Not only did she draw attention to Leon Atkin's ability to attract large congregations, she also remembered another minister who served during the time when the Hall had a choir which had 'Three-hundred-and-seventy pairs of legs'. (One of the young men had counted them from below the stage.) But it was pastoral work rather than preaching which was giving most people cause for complaint.

The view most often expressed was that there had been a decline in the minister's pastoral role over recent years. Yet it was clear that this was not a new problem. One member compared the Revd Cotton 'who always came to visit. Came when I had a lot of problems', with his predecessor 'Mr[sic] Thomas'. 'He was here thirteen years. Came to this house twice. Once to ask me to type something, the second time to bury my grandmother. He never came to visit her pastorally'. That note of personal affront could be detected in other interviews. Another respondent was critical of Revd Thomas; 'He done[sic] nothing for the church'. In her view he was responsible for the closure of the Sunday School and the decline in membership which took place during his long ministry. She, too, praised Revd Cotton mainly because 'He was so good looking'. Yet the assessment made by these two women members was reversed by a (male) lay leader. He claimed that Revd Thomas had been a good minister but 'We[I] were not so keen on Revd Cotton'.

It was because of the open currency in these subjective and personalised views of the role and position of the minister that criticisms of individual ministers were so common. There was little sign of the more inhibited approach found at the Baptist Church, where a culture of deference and respect precluded such openly critical attitudes. But even those Methodists who felt most neglected by their minister recognised that the notion of pastoral care had a number of ramifications. They pointed out the adverse effect the 'failure to visit' was having on the church itself. There were a number of members who were housebound but would give financial support if encouraged. There were others who once attended services and could probably be persuaded to 'return to the fold'.

There was less comment on the minister's role as preacher and teacher due, perhaps, to the fact that at Central Hall the present minister fills only twenty per cent of the pulpit time available. Of course, charismatic orators like Leon Atkin were always welcome, but it was the personality of the present incumbent, the Revd Watson, that concerned them most. He was described as 'very nice but remote', unlike one of his predecessors who had been a 'magnetic character but rather shallow'. One respondent was anxious to balance these subjective judgements with an acknowledgement of the severe problems faced by Methodist ministers. Many of them stemmed from the detailed administrative procedures of the Methodist Church reflecting its preoccupation with rules and standardisation. (Ranson et al, 1977:152) She also pointed out that 'Mister' Watson was out every evening except Saturday: the result of a work-load which embraced a number of committees, nine societies, the Mid Glamorgan Mission and The Team, plus the demand of his 'boss', the Superintendent Minister. As the senior minister in the circuit he was also called on to support his less experienced colleagues. This respondent asked me if I was aware of the amount of specialised knowledge expected of Methodist ministers. She noted that the number of regulations governing the Methodist Church stood at nine-hundred and eighty-eight.

In view of these constraints the expectations and critical comments voiced above seem unreasonable. But these people belonged to an organisational structure and a strong culture which combined to give the minister both authority and privileges; for example, exclusive rights to administer the sacraments. Such a situation would appear to contradict Methodism's democratic traditions, and the view that all Christians should be regarded as ministers,

with the consequent emphasis on the theological and organisational equality between lay and full-time leaders. (Ranson et al, 1977:153) Despite this allegiance to the 'priesthood of all believers', the evidence suggests that Central Hall had never experienced the same level of lay authority as that enjoyed by the deacons of Cwmtref Baptist Church. One reason for this was the strictly enforced division of labour between clergy and laity. The Baptist Church could function indefinitely without a pastor, his place being taken by the deacons and church officers. But at Central Hall there were tasks like administering communion or presiding over the Church Council which could be carried out only by a minister.

As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, these barriers between clergy and laity are an integral feature of the Methodist polity, despite claims to the contrary. (cf. Campbell, 1985, Clark, 1984; Deeks, 1985) Lay people are not granted the same freedom of movement between the different levels of the denominational structure, or the access, by right, to the ruling Methodist Conference. While some ministers may regard these as onerous obligations rather than privileges, one study found that the Methodist ministers interviewed had 'strong feelings about [their] autonomy, professional reference and colleague control, and that they stress the group and authority aspects of professionalism, and regard interaction with colleagues as a necessity'. (Ranson, et al, op.cit.:152)

This same study also found a social division between clergy and laity. The clergy they surveyed were mainly middle-class and products of the grammar school system; the membership of the Methodist Church being mainly working-class. (ibid.:150) Central Hall's experience is similar with only one working-class minister,

Revd Thomas, born and brought-up in the Valleys. His successor, Revd Cotton, was an Oxbridge graduate and, like all the other ministers who had served Central Hall, was English and middle-class. Strangely enough, it was the local boy who had provoked the most comment, with opinions being divided about the value of his ministry.

But while there was some ambivalence about the character and performance of individual ministers, the authority of the office they held was accepted without question. Those aspects of clergy authority discussed in the previous chapter - a person called-apart, the holder of specialised knowledge and training, the responsibility for the programme, training, recruitment, and financing of the local church - were taken for granted by the members of this society and never challenged by its lay leaders. In terms, therefore, of formal authority - the product of the organisational structure of the society - the minister was in an unassailable position. At the same time, he profited from the culture of the Methodist Church (and of this society) with its legitimation of ministerial authority. Given these circumstances why was the influence and power exerted by Revd Watson so ineffectual?

Two reasons can be posited. One arises from the modification of the formal structure. The other springs from the failure of this particular agent to use the informal procedures and processes to his advantage; a skill demonstrated so ably by the Baptist pastor.

The structural changes described earlier devalued his contribution as preacher, teacher and pastor; all of them important elements of member socialisation and the legitimacy of the minister. I asked Revd Watson how he saw his role as preacher

and teacher. He seemed surprised by the question, mainly because he had already said that his main sphere of influence was the Church Council and that he had a poor opinion of his skill as an orator. When pressed, however, he drew attention to the lack of pulpit-time available to him and suggested that it was difficult to achieve much in the way of consistent teaching on the basis of just two Sundays per month. At the same time he was willing to concede that the tasks of interpreting the Bible, giving a lead on current moral, theological, and social issues, and setting the society's agenda, were the responsibility of the minister and required a strong input from the pulpit.

The lack of pulpit-time did make these tasks more difficult to perform but it may not have been as serious an obstacle as Revd Watson suggested. His concern about quantity failed to account for the balancing effect of the quality of the teaching and preaching he was able to provide. After all, he was not competing for the attention and loyalty of the congregation on equal terms with the other occupants of the pulpit.. Central Hall was served by a motley crew of lay preachers and visiting ministers. All were obviously committed to the Church but they varied in the level of their ability and in their theological viewpoint. In a nine month period I listened to an Anglican Rector, a Baptist layman, and the Chairman of the Methodist District. One of the quarterly preaching plans listed twenty different preachers, less than half of whom were trained or qualified (accredited). Among this group were two strict fundamentalists who defended the 'factual' account of the creation given in Genesis, and two others who spoke about "problems of this day and age" with a scarcely a mention of the Bible.

Such a varied output could hardly be regarded as a clear and coherent body of teaching with the potential for providing an alternative perspective to that advocated by the minister. So even though his own contributions were thinly spread they could still carry some weight. He did have the advantage of preaching at consistent intervals. Moreover, it was pointed out that certain 'reluctant recruits' made a point of being present whenever the minister was leading the service. And, of course, when he stood there with his clerical collar and ministerial uniform, he embodied, for a brief time at least, all the authority of his office. Revd Watson had the further advantage of almost forty years' in the ministry, including a period as a superintendent minister. Here, then, was authority which came from the rational order or formal structure of the church and from the knowledge and experience of the office holder. (Ingrams, 1980:41)

The structural constraints on the exercise of this authority were, therefore, less serious than was thought. But a second possible explanation of this minister's apparent lack of influence can be found in his inability to use the informal organisational processes, and the attendant social relations, to his advantage. Some respondents thought that his weakness in this area of the society's life stemmed from his personal characteristics. According to them, Revd Watson had a diffident approach to personal relationships. One member who had come to know him well pointed out that he was, by nature, an introvert who disliked imposing his views on others. These judgements may have been distorted by memories of a succession of fairly colourful ministers, from Leon Atkins onwards.

In more objective terms, consideration has to be given to the problems posed by a weak lay leadership. As the Revd

Watson pointed-out, he was used to societies with greater resources and better organisation. In those circumstances, the minister is freed from much of the detailed administration. At the same time, the lay leaders take more responsibility for the running of the society. At Cwmtref, however, the minister had to contend with a lay leadership which appeared anxious to blame him when things went wrong, yet refused to take any initiatives themselves.

It was his wide experience with other societies which led him to over-estimate the power of the Church Council. His bid to influence Central Hall's policies and attitudes through the Council failed to acknowledge the precarious condition of the Hall's internal polity. When a society has a strong administrative structure it uses a working pattern similar in many respects to those of the Baptist Church. That is, all the business of the church would be processed through a system of sub-committees and auxiliary organisations. But at Central Hall it tended to arrive at the Church Council in its raw state. The absence of any kind of intermediary decision-making meant that individual council members could oppose or obstruct proposals without exposing themselves to the charge of disloyalty to the minister or their fellow office-holders.

Attempts to make the Church Council into the type of democratic policy-making body envisaged by the Methodist constitution were further hampered by the long interval between meetings. Standing orders required just two meetings a year which left extensive periods when decisions were made and policies formed on a purely ad hoc basis; often without reference to the minister:

In churches people make decisions and often carry them out themselves. So often, everybody does what seems good in their own eyes...It is always possible not to bother with meetings and to leave decisions to the two or three members of the congregation who have always done it, or even to a single person...

(Superintendent Minister, Mid Glamorgan Mission in Link, Spring 1985)

Those comments may have been written with Central Hall in mind. It certainly provides an apt introduction to a more detailed look at the role of the lay leadership in Cwmtref's Methodist Society.

The lay leadership

Both of the congregations featured in this study found it difficult to reconcile the principles on which their particular polity was founded with its form and practice. The Baptist church, for example, while intending to discourage powerful individual leaders, had produced a succession of authoritative pastors and deacons. As far as Central Hall was concerned, the organisational structure gave great authority to the minister and a high level of autonomy to individual lay leaders, yet there were continual complaints about the ineffectiveness of their leadership. When questions were asked about the lay leaders of the past it became obvious that Central Hall did not have a dynasty of powerful men (or women) to rival the Baptist deacons. There was, however, one possible exception. One of the founder members had been given a memorial in the form of a

framed photograph hung on the wall of the room used as a chapel. The oldest respondent recalled that he had been a dominant figure in the days before Central Hall. None of his contemporaries -or successors- had succeeded in reaching this particular 'hall of fame'.

It is possible to trace the problems being experienced by the present leaders back to the way their position is defined by the organisational structure of the Methodist Church. For example, the demands placed on ministers by the circuit system forces the lay leaders to run the societies in Sunday by Sunday terms. Where a society has a large number of members, the stewards can rely on the support of a network of sub-committees. Central Hall, however, was facing the consequences of the run-down of that basic system. The result was that individual stewards were left to operate with virtually no support or guidance. At the time of the fieldwork all the multifarious tasks involved in running a local church were left to four people: a property steward, chapel steward, the treasurer, and the minute secretary. Each of these was responsible just for the area designated by his or her title. In this regard the organisational structure gave considerable power and authority to individual leaders, but restricted the area in which they could be applied.

Once again, however, Central Hall was failing to match the administrative pattern provided by the Methodist Church. The situation of their chapel steward is a case in point. His job description indicates a range of responsibilities similar to those of the Baptist deacon. That is, the chief responsibility is concerned with the organisation of all the services

of worship and any other public meetings. This can involve tasks which range from seeing that the preacher has a glass of fresh water to taking care of visiting dignitaries. At Central Hall, however, the chapel steward was also the organist. This meant that the property steward would give out the hymn-books, greet worshippers, take the offertory, and read the notices.

On Sunday mornings the system suffered even greater abuse.

The property steward did not attend Sunday morning services, while the chapel steward was away 'moonlighting' as the organist of a local Anglican church. Hence, for a long period, there was no one in charge. As a result, a second chapel steward was appointed. She continued much as she had done before; playing the piano, reading notices, counting the collection, paying the preacher and, on one occasion, preaching the sermon herself.

As if the breakdown in these organisational procedures was not enough, the Hall also had to contend with the problems caused by having virtually two separate congregations. Very few of the morning worshippers attended on Sunday evening, and vice versa. Some members belonged to more than one society, or at least had divided loyalties. The treasurer and his whole family managed to support two societies on the same day. In fact, the only officer to attend both Sunday services on a regular basis was the minute secretary. Yet the strict division of labour maintained by Methodism meant that she had no greater responsibility for the organisation of church services than any other member. In other words, if there was no chapel steward present, anybody (or nobody) could take over.

One consequence of this administrative system, and the way it had been weakened at Central Hall, was that there was a general air of uncertainty about the position of the lay

leaders. This was coupled with a growing discontent among many of the stewards about the extension of their duties and responsibilities, and a number of complaints from members about individual leaders and what they judged to be inefficiency and lack of commitment. The property steward was the main target for these personal criticisms. In some instances there were signs of individual animosity, but on other occasions the comments passed reflected a genuine anxiety about the welfare of Central Hall.

It was pointed-out that this steward had held office for over twenty-five years yet seemed more committed to secular causes and organisations than to the needs of Central Hall. This particular complaint had come to the surface after a photograph appeared in the local paper showing the steward presenting a cheque on behalf of the league of friends of a nearby hospital. It was suggested that the money he had raised for that cause would have solved Central Hall's immediate financial problems. When I asked him about not attending Sunday morning services he said it was because his position with the league of friends involved hospital visiting on Sunday afternoons. One of his critics noted that despite his full time-table, he sometimes delivered and collected the preacher for the Sunday morning service, even if he could not spare the hour needed to actually join in the worship.

It is important not to get these criticisms out of proportion. There is a tendency for those 'in the ranks' to grumble about their superiors. Some of the Baptist members drew attention, in private, to the shortcomings of some of their officers, but made sure that their comments were regarded as confidential and 'off the record'. There was, therefore, a

sensitivity to the public image of the church and an awareness of the respect and deference due to 'the deacon' regardless of his or her personal failings.

Central Hall's members were far less inhibited, mainly because of the lower religious (and social) standing attached to the office of steward. For while the position has a strong Biblical precedent with all believers encouraged to be good stewards (cf. 1 Corinthians, 4.), it does lack the elements of special calling and apostolic succession associated with the Baptist office of deacon. This is expressed by the tendency to restrict stewards to practical tasks while leaving religious and spiritual matter to the minister. Thus it was that the property steward at Central Hall was being judged on his fund-raising skills and the halting way he read the notices, not on his qualities as a spiritual leader. This division between religious and practical tasks is reinforced by the Methodist polity which gives the ordained full-time clergy sole rights over the sacraments and other 'religious' functions. As with so many other organisational aspects, this basic division of labour had become exaggerated at Central Hall. Hence, only one of the stewards took any part in public worship. Indeed, it was the members of the congregation who were called on whenever someone was required to lead in prayer, read the lesson, or preside over a service.

To some extent, this lack of religious or theological legitimation, together with the shortage of specialised experience, did not matter to the stewards. After all, their level of responsibility was low, especially in comparison to their Baptist counterparts. Unlike the Baptist deacons, they would not be

expected to take charge of Central Hall if a minister was not available; a duty placed on the Baptist deacons by the church's constitution. No matter how difficult the circumstances at Central Hall became, some sort of ministerial oversight would be provided by the Circuit. This knowledge may have been of some comfort to the stewards of Central Hall, yet it did not alter their anomalous situation. With their minister virtually a part-timer, they were faced with maintaining the society's programme, even though it was not their responsibility, and thus became the main targets of criticism and complaint.

The outcome was that they were in the impossible situation of being held accountable for many of the problems besetting Central Hall yet were not granted the authority needed to tackle these problems. Moreover, this burden of unrealistic expectations had grown as the number of members had declined. Individual stewards found that they had to step outside their 'speciality' because of the shortage of workers. From their point of view they were faced with a membership which was critical of its leadership, yet seemed unwilling to acknowledge the extent to which the stewards were constrained by the organisational structure of the church.

The minister was more willing to recognise those constraints. He noted how difficult it was for those men and women who found that the 'job description' on which their post was based no longer applied. A more long-standing problem involved those members of the society who had a range of skills and qualities, yet were expected to subsume them under the strict limitations of a job title, such as property steward. He saw the irony of having people in the same congregation who would not take office because of contradictory reasons; either that too much was expected of them or too little. Other stewards

(and potential recruits) disliked the concept of individual responsibility which made them even more exposed to the critical gaze of the members and their fellow leaders. As we saw with the Baptist church, the idea of collective responsibility can afford a measure of protection to those individuals who are not operating efficiently. The stewards of Central Hall lacked this protection and were always being judged as individuals.

The comparison between Methodist steward and Baptist deacon is worth pursuing. The main weakness of the Baptist system was its failure to block the emergence of dominant individuals. Even so, the image of team leadership was preserved. All of the duties (except the specialised jobs of secretary and treasurer) were shared among the diaconate with no one person being delegated to take charge of a specific area of the church's work. Moreover, the ultimate responsibility for the smooth-running and future prosperity of the church lay with the diaconate as a decision-making body accountable to the congregation. The stewards of Central Hall had no colleagues in this sense, nor did they belong to a properly structured executive. All decisions about their particular area of work could be made and implemented by them as individuals without consulting anyone; though provisions were made for the minister to advise (but not instruct) them. Here were officers of a voluntary organisation, where the committee is endemic, aware of their isolation and vulnerability.

The Church Council

What then of the Church Council, the society's only provision for collective leadership? Surely this body could relieve some of the individual leaders' anxieties, while

also filling some of the other organisational gaps. The most noticeable of these was the lack of a forum for the ordinary members of the society. Even if the level of participation offered by the Baptist Church meeting could not be equalled, it did seem feasible that the members would, through the Council, be able to contribute through a form of representative democracy.

But in Central Hall's case, at least, the Church Council failed to fulfil any of those expectations. It had lapsed into an arena for the exclusive use of the leadership. Of course, in more prosperous days, there was an element of representation involved, simply because all those actively involved in the work of the society were given a seat. Thus, for example, the newest member of the Sunday School staff would have found herself sitting on the Council alongside the senior stewards and officers of the society. Now, however, that mix was no longer possible. The only subsidiary organisation still surviving was the women's meeting which meant that the Council was almost completely dominated by officers and stewards.

But there were other drawbacks for those who wanted to regard the Council as a means of governing the society. One was the evident lack of cohesion. Much of this sprang from the failure to acknowledge the principle of shared responsibility which characterised the work of the Baptist diaconate. In its place - as many of its members admitted - was a parliament made up of individuals representing no one except themselves. As a result, any or all of these individuals could express contradictory views and work toward different objectives. Given these circumstances, it was difficult to see how the 'policies' and attitudes of this Council could reflect the wishes of the society as a whole.

Many of those involved described the adversarial nature of Council meetings and suggested one individual was chiefly to blame for the frequent outbreaks of open hostility. The person concerned was not an elected officer of the society. It was unclear how he came to claim a seat on the Council. One possible reason was that he was an accredited lay preacher, the other that he was a grandson of the founder member whose portrait hung on the chapel wall. His church career related closely to his background, progressing through Sunday School and youth club, with the almost mandatory period of rebellion in his teens. However, one friend of the family suggested that Richard's period of alienation from the church was colouring his present views. She pointed-out that Richard had been 'forced-out' (with others) by the actions of an authoritarian minister.

Certainly it was the Methodist style of ministry, and the performance of individual ministers, which were the targets for Richard's ultra-critical views. After a Sunday morning service he told me, and a small group of fellow worshippers, that it was the full-time ministers who were to blame most for the decline of Central Hall. Among a long list of personal (and libellous) judgements on present and previous ministers were some perceptive comments on the way the ministry had developed. First, he noted 'the poor standards of the full-time ministry which is epitomised by the neglect of their pastoral duties'. Then there had been 'a further relapse caused by the drastic move in training and orientation toward professionalism and administrative skills'. In his opinion, 'Mr Watson has a similar approach to that which I encounter in my business life where management and sales techniques are all-important.'

These changes in the role and training of ministers had coincided with a 'lamentable structural modification' resulting from the denomination's decision to dispense with the Class Meeting. This had caused a further 'rapid decline in pastoral care and a dearth of evangelical activity' [in the sense of recruiting new members]. The Methodist Class Meeting has been described by one observer as an event which

included evangelism, prayer, Bible study, and religious conversation...[it] became a powerful and dynamic tool of pastoral care and spiritual growth in which class leaders watched over the souls of their brethren...[it] became the basic natural pattern of spiritual and social life in the church.

(Lampard, 1985:28)

It was this meeting, then, which was one of the prime sources of the pastoral and educational elements of the ministry which were no longer available to the people of Central Hall.

Richard did not restrict his attack to the full-time ministers. He suggested that the present crop of lay leaders lacked the qualities [and opportunities?] of their predecessors. Among the group listening to this indictment was the minute secretary and two other members who also had a seat on the Church Council. When asked about his performance they said that he was just as direct at council meetings. They recalled the meetings held when Revd Cotton was minister which always ended with an altercation between Richard and the minister. One respondent suggested that 'Mr' Watson was the only minister to remain on speaking terms with Richard after almost a full-term of ministerial service.

Given his robust performance, strong reactions to Richard were only to be expected. Yet, there was much sympathy for his views though his confrontational stance was criticised. For while his fellow-members were not above complaining about the performance of ministers and lay leaders, their comments were made in private while Richard's semi-public carping was discourteous if not disrespectful.

It would appear, therefore, that we need to think of the lay leadership in individual terms and not as an executive. While this lack of cohesion had its drawbacks it did provide space for agent activity and an ultra-pluralistic decision-making process. In theory at least, anyone with access to the Church Council, or given responsibility by the society, could influence policy and attitudes. In practice, however, this basic 'free-market' administration did not work. Initiatives and decisions disappeared in the administrative 'black-hole' resulting from the inadequacy of both individual office holders and of the Church Council.

Yet, there was an issue which forced the Church Council to make one of its rare collective decisions, and which also exposed to an even greater degree the polarisation between the agents and interests involved. This same issue gives us insight into the attitude of this society to unemployment and other social issues. Above all, it allows a much closer scrutiny of the internal formal and informal processes and of the social relations arising from them.

Unemployment and the future of 'The Hall'

The issue that came to a head during this research concerned the problems posed by the hall itself. As noted earlier,

the society was responsible for two buildings; the lesser hall, as large as a medium size nonconformist chapel, and Central Hall, the modified amphitheatre which, I was told, seats nine-hundred and ninety-nine. Central Hall was designed as a social amenity, as well as a place of worship, and as such was regarded as a 'gift' to the community with the society acting as its stewards. In the past it had been used extensively as the main public venue in the town. It was still in use for large concerts and other local events. But any attempt to increase its use by the local community would have to overcome the Methodist Church's strictly enforced regulations forbidding gambling and the purchase or consumption of alcohol.

The awareness that the hall was a public facility had acted against the society's interests. When they tackled the question of whether they could afford to keep it open any longer, it was this consideration which prevented them deciding to close it. As the minister pointed-out, they used little of the building for their own purposes. Sunday services were held in a small ante-room. Another room and the kitchen was used for coffee mornings and faith teas. A third room was reserved for private devotions. During the eighteen months of the field research the society ventured into the hall itself just once. This was for a 'festival of praise' involving the Mid Glamorgan Mission. In the circumstances, their lack of sentimental attachment to the building was understandable; a sharp contrast to the Baptists' jealous protection of their chapel. The Revd Watson did suggest that the Hall should be regarded as a 'statement of faith to a modern age', but few of the members appeared to share his sentiments.

Those who had once shared his rather high-minded view, found that it was undermined by the problems involved in maintaining the fabric of the building. Even those tasks which benefited the society, such as the arrangement of commercial lettings, were regarded as irksome. Some remnant of their pride in 'Cwmtref's finest public building' could still be found, but usually accompanied by guilt and remorse over the way it had been allowed to decline. Given this high level of anxiety over the public image of the Hall, it was surprising to find the members worshipping amid some extremely squalid surroundings.

Service held in ante-room of C.H. Seats about 50. Fairly delapidated state... walls decorated with what looks like old-fashioned distemper which had flaked badly... a strange assortment of religious, domestic and institutional furniture and fittings: school chairs (wooden seats, metal frames), kitchen wall-clock (electric), a pouffe for the minister to kneel on, communion table (plain), and lectern. Floor covered with lino and small mats. White bakelite lampshades. An assortment of heating appliances, calor-gas heaters, two-bar electric fires. (Field notes, 14.7.85)

Most of the worshippers seemed depressed rather than angered by their surroundings. Some put the blame on the property steward, others thought it was the result of a more general apathy. The most common excuse, however, was the Hall itself. If the Hall was refurbished, then so would the ante-room. This, alone, was good reason to support the minister and leaders in their search for a low-cost scheme.

One proposal had already been rejected. This involved the local authority taking over the building then leasing back to the society any rooms they may want to use. While many of the leaders supported this scheme they were faced by two major snags. One was the irrevocable Methodist ordinance on gambling and alcohol which would remain in force after the building was transferred. The second was that while the society would be allowed to make the local authority a gift of the Hall, they would then become liable for the repayment of the seven-thousand pounds which the denomination had invested in the building. Stalemate was reached because the local council would not agree to the first of these conditions and the society could not fulfil the second.

A more promising plan, and one which had been the subject of an extended debate, suggested that the Hall could be used as a training centre for the local unemployed. The society's first response was to suggest that the first part of the training programme would be concerned with renovating the Hall. This would solve their most pressing problem. In return, the trainees could use the ancillary rooms as workshops or offices. The auditorium, however, would be declared out of bounds. One obvious attraction of this particular scheme was that it allowed the present congregation to associate themselves with the Hall's 'golden period'; the 1930's when Leon Atkin had instigated a similar scheme. This clear historical parallel appealed to the older members in particular. But the minister thought the present scheme should be seen in terms of a practical expression of the Social Gospel, which, he suggested, was still an important ingredient in Methodist doctrine and teaching.

Despite the advantages and attractions provided by the scheme it was eventually rejected by the Church Council. When council members were asked about this decision they suggested that it had been made on purely rational and pragmatic grounds. The advantages had been weighed against the costs, such as the financial outlay involved, and the time and effort it would require from individual officers to administer the scheme. As far as the money was concerned, it was the initial expenditure which posed the problem. The local authority had asked the society to carry out some essential modifications such as the provision of fire doors. They did, however, suggest that these costs could be reimbursed through a reduction on the rents the society would have to pay for the use of the ante-rooms. According to the minute secretary, the society would eventually make a profit of around five-hundred pounds on this transaction.

It seems the council was more worried about the short-term loss involved. At the same time there was a reluctance to accept the increased burden it would place on the stewards and other officers. How much of this anxiety was justified is debateable. It was based on a scenario which had hordes of unemployed teenagers running amok through the building (a prospect which had not deterred their 1930's counterparts). To combat this problem the auditorium doors would have to be securely padlocked (after the trainees had finished renovating it) while the stewards would be involved in constant supervision and strict monitoring of the scheme. Some respondents thought that it was the extra work and responsibility arising from the scheme that led to its rejection, rather than finance.

While the minister acknowledged that these practical problems had worried many of the leaders, in his opinion they rejected the scheme because 'the idea behind the scheme was considered unattractive'. In other words they were against the notion of the church intervening in social issues, even when such an intervention could bring long-term benefits to the society. Here, then, was a powerful 'province of meaning' which embraced a particular view of the local church and its role in relation to the community. (Bartunek, 1984) But if the minister's analysis was correct, how did this society develop this type of 'province' and what were its origins?

Again, the minister was able to offer an explanation. He argued that the response of this congregation to unemployment and social issues was the result of changes which occurred after the second world war. At one level, was a modification in the make-up of the society as women slowly outnumbered the men [though men still dominated the leadership]. Women, claimed Revd Watson, are generally 'less politically minded' and so the society became less sensitive to socio-political questions.

Coinciding with this demographic change came what he described as a 'religious backlash' to the social Gospel which had been advocated in the nineteen-twenties and thirties. This had been reinforced by the decline in numbers and resources which had led to the growth of a 'siege mentality'. Here, then, was a model of the local church which appears to suggest that a positive response to social issues requires a well-resourced and politically aware congregation, led by men.

That explanation omits the organisational factors which are the main interest of this thesis. The evidence presented

so far has described Central Hall's peculiar circumstances, and the difficulties caused by the modification of the society's internal structures and processes. The minister's explanation appears to draw on an idealised rather than actual view of the way the society was run. It implies that the policies and attitudes of the society were an accurate reflection of the changes in the members' province of meaning. If his viewpoint is valid, the decisions made by the Church Council over a long period were influenced by the backlash against the social gospel, the prevailing air of defensiveness, and the reluctance of the (women) members to become involved in questions which had a political aspect. The decision to reject the scheme for renovating the hall could, therefore, be seen as representing the society's response to unemployment.

That implies an image of the Church Council which is far removed from the one painted by our respondents and by an investigation of the decision made about the hall. From the respondents we gained a picture of the council as a body which found difficulty in any type of collective decision-making, let alone one which would be so responsive to the views and attitudes of the society as a whole. It was noted that Central Hall had a pronounced 'religious division of labour' (Wilson, 1982:98) which was linked to an antagonistic and uncoordinated set of social relations. These factors were, in turn, connected to a weakened organisational structure which had reduced decision-making at all levels to an individual basis. It is clear, therefore, that the organisational factors need to be taken into account when seeking to provide an explanation for the rejection of the scheme. I would argue, that they provide a fuller, more valuable analysis than one relying

on notions of psychological defence mechanisms and changes in theological and political 'interpretive schemes'. (Bartunek, 1984)

Even so, the analytical model used in this thesis does draw attention to the concept of organisational culture which is closely linked to individual perceptions (actor's models) and the modifications of organisational structures. (Bartunek, 1984; Watson, 1987) At this stage, however, I want to concentrate on what might be called the mechanics of this particular decision, and the strong political element in that process which is revealed when we identify the agents involved.

The two leaders most in favour of the scheme were the minister and the minute secretary, two actors who (for different reasons) had little influence on the Church Council. The minute secretary was handicapped by the rigidly enforced division of labour, which cast her as an administrator without any formal authority. As far as the minister was concerned, his authority, and the power that went with it, had been undermined in a number of ways, as we noted earlier. In this instance it was the lack of confidence expressed by individual members, especially Richard, which was making his claim to influence the society through the Church Council difficult to meet. And, of course, Richard was not just unwilling to accept the authority of the minister. He was determined to oppose it whenever possible.

There may have been a number of reasons for Richard's disillusionment with full-time ministers. But he was also involved in the conflict between the lay leaders themselves. Again, it was possible to line-up a number of opposing 'parties', but when the scheme came on the agenda it was Richard and the property steward who emerged as the chief protagonists. Some of the respondents suggested that their disagreement had a long history, but that it was the debate about the future

of the building which had brought it to the surface. The property steward accused Richard of delaying the decision on the scheme by 'reneging' on his promise to have the plans drawn-up. In a recorded interview he claimed that Richard had lied openly to the minister, and the other members of the Church Council. A breakdown in social relations of that order would pose obvious problems if the scheme had been accepted. If it was to work, it would have required the full cooperation of the lay leaders and some measure of shared responsibility between them.

But there is need to look beyond the political activity of the agents involved and the effect of their social relations. The origins of the crisis faced by the society were to be found in the inflexible organisational structure, and the demands it placed on individual leaders. As far as the formal procedures were concerned, the onus for the implementation and smooth working of the scheme rested on the property steward. While he acknowledged this situation, he flatly rejected the high level of responsibility it placed upon him. Unfortunately, no other single leader had a right to take it over. Indeed, some respondents suggested that if someone had volunteered to take over the post the property steward would have been unwilling to relinquish it. If substitution was not possible neither was sharing on any kind of official, consistent basis. Certainly, the Church Council with its lack of continuity and discordant membership seemed incapable of providing collective leadership, and Central Hall did not have any other groups or committees. It is possible to envisage these structural obstacles being overcome through ad-hoc collective formations, but this was not a realistic alternative for a society with such a dearth of amicable social relations.

This point can be clearly illustrated if we transposed the same problem into the setting of Cwmtref Baptist Church. Here was a polity which had produced a set of strong and resilient social relations with the capacity to overcome any incompatibility between the actors concerned. During its history the church had survived two periods of conflict which had led to the resignation of some of its officers. Because of the emphasis on the collective authority of the diaconate, spoiling tactics by individuals were rarely successful. So a 'Baptist Richard' would have found that the pastor and diaconate were able to resist his attempts to sabotage their plans. Furthermore, the polity would have provided the kind of collective response and shared responsibility needed to shield individual officers. We saw individual officers being shielded in this way when their opposition to the evangelistic campaign was hidden behind the diaconate's decision to give it their support.

The above summary suggests that the polity of Central Hall contained an inherent contradiction. For while it appears to give considerable leeway to agents and allows a high level of micro-political activity, at the same time it constrains and neutralises the activities of other agents. Why else would Richard succeed in influencing the policy and attitude of the society while the minister, the minute secretary, and the property all failed to do the same? We should also note that other agents, such as the auxiliary organisations or the membership as a whole, had even less success.

Yet the fact that the organisational structure appeared to work in Richard's favour, while denying those it was intended to support, owes more to the peculiar circumstances of Central

Hall than to the Methodist polity itself. To a large extent, the advantages gained by Richard came from the modification of the formal structure. For example, it was the lack of intermediate decision-making, and the processing of inputs, which enabled him to mount an attack at the time and place where the key decision was being taken; the Church Council. We can also point to the weakening of the minister's authority and the isolated position of individual stewards which made them vulnerable to attack. Their position may have been more secure in a larger, better-resourced society.

At the same time, credit has to be given to Richard for recognising those weaknesses. He, alone, had no compunction in riding rough-shod over what remained of the structural boundaries. After all, he did not hold office and had virtually no formal authority, yet he was willing to ignore the rights and responsibilities of the property steward, and openly rejected both the informal and formal aspects of clergy authority.

He also appears to have challenged the prevailing culture of Central Hall. There was no evidence of any history of such open revolts against the leadership, despite the high level of dissatisfaction. Indeed the remarks quoted earlier which were critical of Richard's approach suggests that he had offended those whose frame of reference retained a significant measure of respect for clergy authority, if not for the individual office-holder. This impression was reinforced when the behaviour of other agents was examined. The women's group or sisterhood, for example, had many of the attributes of a powerful and influential agent. It was well-organised and quite adventurous when compared to the Baptist women's group. Though services of

worship were the main bill of fare, they did encourage visits from those who could speak on current affairs.

As an organisation, they were much more efficient than the society itself. When I attended the Monday afternoon meetings I noted how so many of the members were involved, taking their turn to read scripture, introduce hymns, or lead in prayer. On a couple of occasions this group took the place of the Sunday morning preacher using the same principles of participation and sharing. This was in marked contrast to other occasions when one of the men would take the service at short notice. He would not ask for any help, one even carried a spare sermon in his inside pocket 'in case of emergencies'. Yet, despite the talents and flair exhibited by this group, it had no official role in the life of the society and remained very much on the margin. A position which was accepted without demur.

In this instance the boundaries set by the structural framework were not breached, neither was the ethos of the society which gave a low priority to group activity. But a similar set of restrictions was placed on one of the individual agents, the minute secretary.

According to the minister she had the leadership qualities which Central Hall needed so badly. Her attitude was positive and progressive, she was well-educated and articulate. The Mid Glamorgan Mission had recognised her talents and made her its recorder. A post which combined administrative skill with an understanding of the often complex matters discussed by the Team. She was a staunch supporter of denominational activities, attending and organising circuit rallies and taking part in weekend retreats. It was her consistent support for local

ecumenical events which had led to her being elected President of Cwmtref Free Church Council for 1986-7. But while she was taking a more prominent role in the wider religious environment, at Central Hall she was still confined to the single task of taking the minutes of Church Council meetings.

So while the secretary of the Baptist church was involved with a wide range of administrative tasks, and was also a deacon, this secretary was to all intents and purposes an ordinary member of the congregation without true leadership status. In fact, the minister of Central Hall did most of the administrative work with all the other jobs available being allocated to individual stewards. The organisational structure, therefore, prevented the minute secretary from increasing her responsibilities. She was left with the alternative of becoming a steward, a move the minister thought unlikely.

Yet, this particular agent was not constrained by the organisational culture in the same way as Richard should have been. Central Hall already had a women steward. She was the individual who was required to do so many different things at Sunday morning services. There were no complaints about her poaching on other leaders' territory, mainly because no other leaders were present. It is likely, then, that the minute secretary could have taken on more responsibility without much opposition. In a similar way, the occasional intervention by the women's group was accepted without question. Even the lay assistant, mentioned earlier, was given considerable freedom despite the lack of formal recognition. And, of course, Richard, demonstrated how it was possible to overcome some forms of 'cultural' pressure and resistance.

It seems, therefore, that this church, like Cwmtref Baptist Church, was going through a period of transition. There were signs of a concerted attack on the formal organisational structure, both from agents and from a gradual change in the society's province of meaning. Linked to these moves was a weakening of the structure itself. The result was an upsurge in agent activity, a blurring of the religious division of labour, and the passing of a crucial decision which, in the short-term at least, determined the response of Central Hall to unemployment and allied issues. Here, then, is a significant demonstration of how organisational factors can affect an organisation's output on a given issue.

It should also be noted that the peculiar organisational factors described in this chapter made the processing of inputs from the environment a much more complex process than it might have been. In better-ordered Methodist societies it is likely that the denomination and the minister would perform as joint mediators of these inputs. Furthermore, the minister would supervise the processing of those inputs, though aided by an active Church Council and the efforts of individual lay leaders. At Central Hall, however, these processes had become disorganised making it difficult to trace the effect of environmental influences, and assess the role of a mediator in filtering those external outputs. Even so, the data revealed a range of inputs received from the local authority, the denomination, and the local community. Those involved with the mediation process included the minister, the property steward, and other individual agents such as Richard.

As the previous chapter showed, the key element emerging from both case studies was the range and effectiveness of the activity of certain agents: the minister in the case of the Baptist Church, Richard in the case of Central Hall. But this activity cannot be explained until it is viewed in the context of the organisational structure in which it took place. Thus, at a general level, I would argue that the Baptist pastor's 'success' was determined by a mix of informal and formal organisational factors. As for Richard, his spoiling tactics depended largely on the loopholes created by the partial breakdown in the formal organisational structure, together with a permissive and changing organisational culture. Note also that while these agents gained from these organisational modifications, others, such as the Methodist minister, did not. These preliminary points serve as an introduction to the concluding chapter which provides a more detailed comparative analysis.

8: Conclusion

This thesis has focused on the most neglected yet most resilient of voluntary organisations: the local church. (Martin, 1978) It has demonstrated how a variety of organisational factors helped shape the response of two particular local churches to high levels of (local) unemployment. The broad theoretical framework or overarching model (Hammersley, 1984:61) was based on open systems theory. From this theory came the notion that local churches are involved in a series of transactions -importing and exporting inputs and outputs- with their environment. Furthermore, these transactions call for the mediation of environmental outputs which are then processed by the organisation itself into its own product or output. (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Pugh et al, 1983; Rudge, 1969)

Beckford (1975) noted that much of the work on religious organisations is concerned with the wider social, political and cultural environment. The data collected here, however, suggests that these two churches have become divorced from that wider environment; victims of the uncoupling of church and society described in much of the literature on secularisation. (see Lyon, 1985 for a summary) Neither of these two local churches had any formal organisational links with, what may be called, local secular activities, while the amount of informal, individual associational links was also low. In fact, all of the formal organisational links, and the majority of informal ones, were with what I have termed, the religious environment. At the formal level there was their involvement with the Cwmtref Free Church Council, while at the personal level were the members of both churches who belonged to Toc H.

This particular sector of the religious environment was distinguished by its allegiance to what are often regarded as

traditional and conservative Christian values. Toc.H., for example, was regarded by its Cwmtref Branch as the means for expressing philanthropic sentiments, directed carefully at the larger and less-political charities. The Chairman admitted that they avoided supporting local causes simply because they were afraid of controversy and accusations of favouritism.

Political controversy, on the other hand, has often surrounded the major ecumenical organisations such as the World and British Councils of Churches. The much older Free Church ecumenical bodies maintain a much lower profile and concentrate on the church's domestic problems. This was the approach which was adopted by Cwmtref's Free Church Council, illustrated by its promotion of good social relations between the local churches and the limited programme of shared worship it provided.

The output of this particular sector of the religious environment of these two churches appeared to legitimate either a negative or non-response to the problem of high unemployment. This is also true of another environmental source, the evangelical church-growth movement from which the pastor drew much of his inspiration. He offered an interpretation of the perspective of this movement which emphasised its fundamentalist orientation while virtually ignoring the moral and political implications of such a conservative theology. (cf. Lyon, 1985)

Though all of these environmental outputs were of some importance, it was clear that the strongest set of environmental outputs came from the parent denominations. (cf. Clark, 1984; Cantrell, et al, 1983; Nelson and Hiller, 1980; Harrison, 1969) This hypothesis did pose something of a theoretical and analytical problem in that the use of an open systems theory approach leads to a dual classification of the denomination, both as a

source of environmental outputs and as the mediator of such outputs. (cf. Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Rudge, 1969) It was decided to retain and deploy both of these categories in order to capture the full richness of the denomination-congregation relationship.

When viewed at the formal organisational level, it was possible to discern how the difference in overall politics affected the position of the denomination in relation to its member churches. So, for example, the unitive and hierarchical structure of the Methodist Church, indicates that it would act, primarily, as the mediator of outputs from the wider environment. (Cantrell et al, 1983; Wilson, 1982) This suggests that the federative structure of the Baptist Church would, in contrast, lead to the denomination's role as mediator being less acceptable, with a consequent tendency for it to be regarded as a source of environmental outputs. (Cantrell et al, op.cit.; Harrison, 1969)

The church-denomination relationships featured in this study departed somewhat from that basic pattern. Cwmtref's Methodist Society was witnessing the near collapse of the mechanism by which it was linked to the Methodist Church, particularly at circuit level. Not even the rudimentary provision of democratic representation was being met. Attempts by the minister and other agents to fill the consequent gap were proving ineffectual, with the result that the society was becoming increasingly marginalised within the denomination. In these circumstances it was virtually impossible for the denomination to perform its mediation role. As a consequence, the society was largely unaware of the debates within the Methodist Church, and the inputs it was receiving tended to be 'raw', and came from a number of disparate, largely individual, sources.

The relationship between Cwmtref Baptist Church and the Welsh Baptist Union seemed, at first glance, to be more in accord with the theoretical pattern found in the sociology of religion literature. Certainly, the church had a high score on the 'autonomy scale' provided by Cantrell et al (1983). Yet there were other indicators which underlined the element of dependence, mutual obligation, even control, in their relationship with the Baptist Union. (cf. Jones, 1985) In the event, it was the power of the pastor which tipped the balance in favour of the congregation and enabled it to treat outputs from the denomination in the same selective fashion as outputs from other parts of its environment. It was the pastor, therefore, who had taken-over the denomination's mediatory function and, as the next section shows, had also gained control of the 'internal' processing of environmental outputs.

Inside the churches

The discovery that both of these churches were involved with the mediation of environmental outputs led to greater emphasis being given to their internal processes and procedures. It was decided that the basic version of open systems theory being used as a general framework was not adequate for the type of detailed investigation now being proposed. I turned, therefore, to the work of Watson (1987) and Bartunek (1984). The result was a model which asked questions about formal, codified, structures and procedures, but also about the informal and non-codified processes (and structures), what Watson (op.cit.) refers to as the 'unofficial aspects of structure'. (p.209) It is the complexity of these 'unofficial' areas of organisational activity that led Watson (ibid) to incorporate into his model the concept of organisational

culture. His basic definition was expanded in order to embrace the concepts of 'frames of reference' or 'provinces of meaning' as deployed by Bartunek(1984). The notions of provinces of meaning or 'actors' models' is also relevant to what Watson(1987:206) terms the 'internal politicking of members'. In other words the range of agent or interest group activity which cannot be explained in terms of 'structure', whether formal or informal.

When the data was analysed the whole of this model was used. Thus, for example, the analysis of the respective roles of the pastor and lay leaders of Cwmtref Baptist Church was examined first in the light of the church's formal, codified procedures. As a consequence, an insight was gained into the way the church's constitution sought to enshrine the fundamental Baptist doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. (cf. Bassett, 1977; Jones, 1985) Then, when the concept of organisational culture was applied to the same data it appeared, at first, to be in line with the constitution in that it also gave the lay leaders a high level of authority and status. Put another way, the frames of reference of individual members and the congregation's province of meaning both enshrined an acceptance of the authority of the deacon, at individual and collective level. The final element of the model showed how the 'politicking' of one senior deacon was a means of reinforcing his (and others) structural position.

But did deacon power necessarily mean that the pastor would be weak? The constitution was heavily biased in favour of the lay leaders and the church membership. Yet, in the absence of codified formal authority, pastors in this type of polity still achieve a kind of 'structural' authority and power. (cf. Ingrams, 1980: 1981; Harrison, 1969) Much of it stems from those 'unofficial' and informal procedures and practices which have grown in

structural strength over a period of time. It was possible, therefore, to trace the power of the present incumbent back to the time when Baptist pastors in Wales first became recognised (and feted) as 'men called apart'. (Bassett, 1977)

It was not surprising, therefore, to find the present pastor being accorded a measure of status and deference, even by those leaders who outranked him. Even so, it left the problem of explaining of how he was able to begin changing part of the congregation's existing province of meaning, and impose a church programme which many lay leaders opposed.

The evidence suggested that he was the first pastor ever to attempt to persuade this congregation to change direction. He was challenging those elements of their province of meaning which concerned the role, function, and ultimately, the organisation of the local church. One consequence of the modification he was proposing would be the virtual elimination of socio-political issues, such as unemployment, from the church's agenda. He was promoting a view of the local church which limited its activities to what were regarded as religious or spiritual matters. At the same time, he was seeking to implement a church programme which, for some leaders, embraced some of the troubling excesses of fundamental and evangelical Christianity.

Ironically, his bid to modify the organisational culture was aided by some aspects of the existing province of meaning. It was the attitudes of respect and deference to the office of pastor that inhibited many of his opponents. Even more crucial was his ability as an agent to use the authority of his office to such good advantage. It was possible to observe the way his astute cultivation of individual social relations, together with other micro-political strategies, enabled him to overcome (in the

short-term at least) the constraints of the formal organisational structure. The power he gained from the informal or unofficial structure, together with his own efforts as agent, allowed him to determine this church's attitude to unemployment. By filling the agenda with other issues and problems (mainly domestic) he had made this congregation's non-response inevitable.

The Baptist pastor's successes were underlined when his record was compared to that of the minister of Central Hall Cwmtref. Certainly, the minister was a much less effective agent; a weakness which served to undermine the advantageous position accorded by the official organisational structure. The Methodist polity has been criticized for the authority it gives the minister at the expense of the laity. (cf. Campbell, 1985; Deeks, 1985) This situation should have been reinforced at Central Hall where the lay leaders were demoralised, but this was not the case. One reason was the minister's attempt to work through the Church Council. Unfortunately, this body was unrepresentative and inefficient. It also lacked the cohesive and cooperative characteristics of the Baptist diaconate.

In fact, the Church Council worked against the minister. It became the arena used by those who wanted to undermine his influence. One layman in particular, sought to attack the minister and his fellow lay leaders. It would be wrong, however, to suggest that his spoiling tactics were the sole reason for the minister's lack of authority, or the poor performance of the stewards and officers. Many of the problems being experienced by the lay leadership could be attributed to the modification of Central Hall's organisational structure.

For this society, unlike many of its larger counterparts, lacked a basic sub-committee structure. As a result the lay

leaders had become isolated and forced to make and implement decisions without support or consultation. Further problems were caused by changes in the official 'religious division of labour'. (Wilson, 1982) Stewards were finding it necessary to intervene in areas of the society's activities over which they had no jurisdiction. The result was widespread confusion, particularly about the mundane, Sunday-by-Sunday tasks. Here, then, were lay leaders facing the contradiction of being held responsible for many of Central Hall's ills, while being prevented by the formal organisational arrangements to take the kind of collective initiatives needed to remedy the situation.

The minister suggested that there was a correlation between the society's problems and certain changes in their province of meaning. Bartunek (1984) argues that changes in the province of meaning lead to modifications of the organisational structure. In this case, however, it was extremely difficult to demonstrate this type of causal connection on any kind of consistent basis.

The decision to reject the training scheme illustrates that point. I could not find any evidence to show that the society's view on the church's socio-political role had altered. To a large degree, they were sympathetic to the idea of using the renovation of the hall as a means to aid some of the local unemployed. It was, after all, an opportunity for them to recapture something of their 'golden period'; the inter-war years when a similar scheme had been implemented. So their province of meaning had not changed on this issue. What had happened was the near-collapse of the organisational structure, and it was the problems of organisation and administration which caused the scheme to be rejected.

This suggests a marked absence of any correlation between the province of meaning and the organisational structure. But when the analysis is taken a stage further Bartunek's (1984) central argument is upheld. For when purposeful, as opposed to unintended, organisational changes are made they do require a change in the province of meaning. One example from the data relates to the attempt to persuade the society to recognise the minister's 'lay assistant'. This was being withheld mainly because their province of meaning could not accommodate the notion of a layperson taking over the minister's 'spiritual' duties. In a similar way, the kind of ad hoc collective approach needed to make training scheme work, was never proposed because the society still thought of its lay leaders in terms of individual responsibility, and of their minister as the authority figure who could impose the scheme, if necessary, on the reluctant lay leadership.

What had emerged, then, as a negative response to unemployment was, in a sense, more like the non-response of the Baptist Church, in that the question had never been discussed directly. The main reason for the omission of the ideological or theological aspects was that the agenda was dominated by the practical problems arising out of the flaws in the formal organisational structure. The organisational culture could also be regarded as a contributory factor in that it inhibited the repair of the organisational structure. And, finally, the analysis shows how the activities of the agents involved affected the situation. It juxtaposes the spoiling tactics of Richard against the ineffectiveness of the minister. This particular minister was especially unsuccessful in using the authority of his office

to influence the policy and attitudes of the society. Unlike his Baptist counterpart, he was unable to control the pulpit, or impose his personal programme. (cf. Ingrams, 1980:1981) At the same time, he had gained a poor reputation for his pastoral work and for the quality of the social relations he had cultivated with 'his flock'. So, while the efforts of the Baptist pastor had served to compensate for the disadvantages arising out of his position in the formal structure, the work of the Methodist minister had succeeded only in exposing the organisational problems, and the consequent failure of Central Hall to attempt any kind of coherent initiative.

The local church

The picture of the local church which emerges from this study is broadly similar to that portrayed by writers such as Clark (1982), Harris (1969b), Rex and Moore (1967), Wickham (1957). It is of an insular organisation with little regard for local affairs and largely unresponsive to local problems. But even though the relevance of that type of broad generalisation has been recognised this thesis seeks to reveal and promote an insight rarely articulated in the literature, namely, that local churches are worthy of study as separate (and disparate), largely independent local organisations. (cf. Payne, 1965; Towler, 1970-71)

The distinction between the local church and other levels of religious organisation has often been made. One example can be found in Clark (1982) who follows Moore (1974) in his emphasis of the difference between what he calls 'village Methodism' and Methodism in general. That observation has been extended here to include 'village' Baptists, and has shown that the lack of concern about wider religious issues, also observed in the above studies,

also applies to unemployment and socio-political issues. The analysis was then taken a stage further in order to explore the way organisational factors have influenced this lack of fit between the two local churches and their environment.

This did not mean, however, that the individual local church could be regarded as a 'black box', but rather, to quote Ball(1987), 'that there was need to explore the different ways in which different organisations cope with and respond differently to interventions and pressures from outside'.(p.24) In meeting that aim use was made of the type of organisational theory so heavily criticised by Ball(ibid.). Its deployment as a theoretical framework or overarching model has, I believe, been fully justified. After all, it would be difficult to chart the response to 'outside pressures' without some investigation of the relationship between organisation and environment. Open systems theory facilitated that investigation while avoiding the over-emphasis of contextual factors. (Nelson and Hiller, 1980)

Ball's(op.cit.) warnings about the structuralist, and functionalist, bias of open systems theory was taken more seriously when the focus moved to the 'internal' features of these local churches. (pp.2-7) This was not to deny the presence and importance of formal structures and processes for their 'internal' polity (cf. Beckford, 1975; Hinings and Foster, 1973), but rather to draw attention to their interrelationship with informal organisational factors, and with the political activity of the actors within those organisations. Hence the use of Watson's(1987) more comprehensive model for this part of the investigation. From this came evidence of the complexity of these local churches, despite their comparatively low level of activity.

Yet,amid,all that complexity it was possible to discern a vital struggle.In the words of Dempsey(1964) 'Minister-lay relations was the fulcrum on which all else seemed to turn'.(p.59) In this respect,these studies have reversed the trend noted by Handy(1976) who suggested that modern organisational theory plays down the importance of individual and group leaders.(p.107) Both of these churches remain clergy centred.Indeed, the Baptist church was experiencing a re-assertion of clergy authority after a period of weak leadership.The members of Central Hall may have been envious of this situation.Their ambitions and anxieties were all laid at the minister's door despite the fact that organisational changes had caused a deterioration of the service being given by the minister.

In assessing the position of these two particular local churches it is tempting to echo Thung's(1987) conclusion: 'We demand too much from the local congregation when we expect it to bring about the laborious "turning towards the world" by itself alone'.(p.355) Yet even her prescription for a 'missionary church' would achieve little unless these churches can turn,and relate,to their immediate religious environment. As the case of Central Hall so graphically illustrated,wider denominational changes such as the Mid Glamorgan Mission mean nothing to churches which are preoccupied by their 'internal' problems and organisation.

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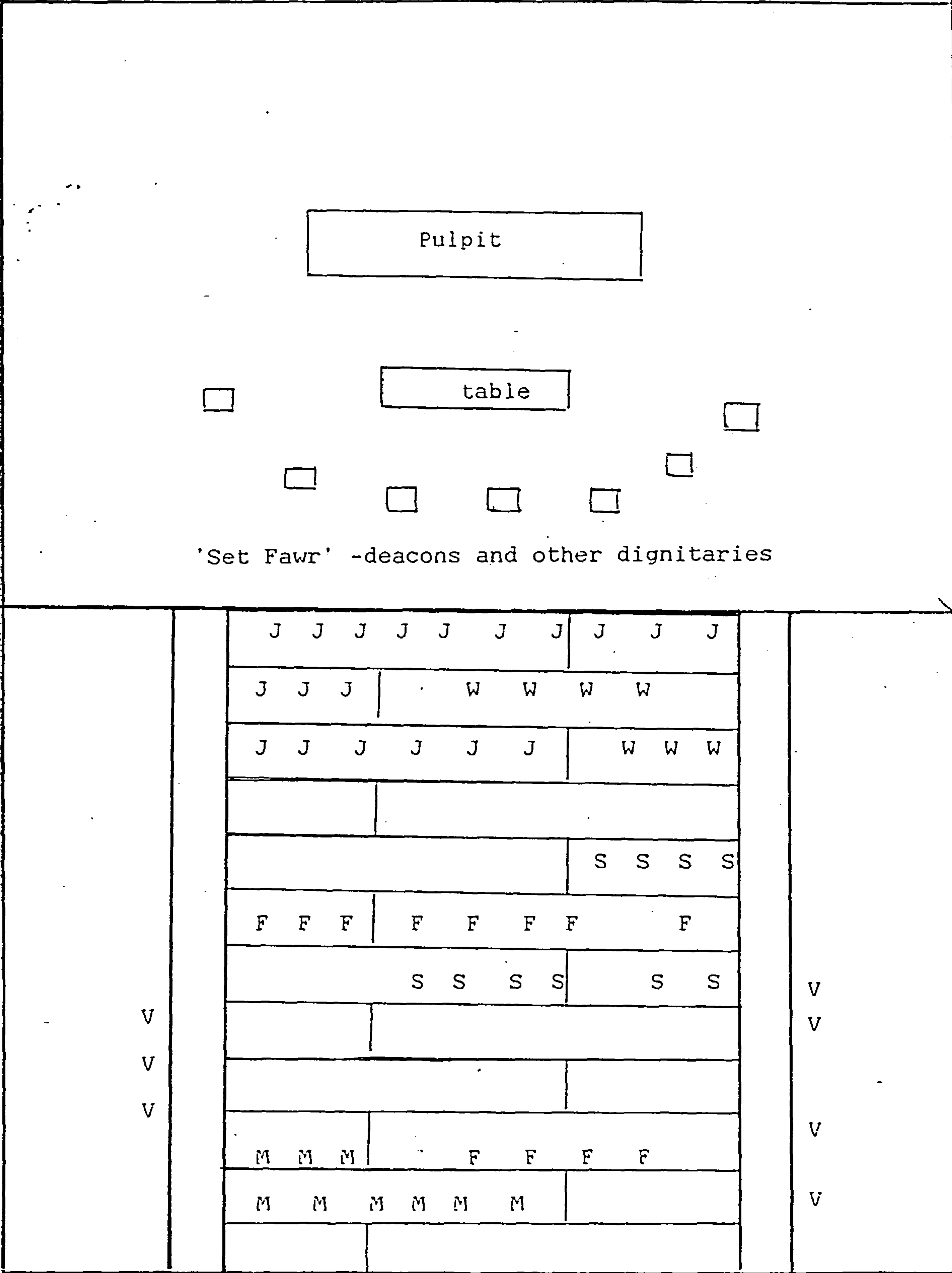
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Appendix one:Cwmtref Baptist Church seating plan.





THE ENGLISH
NEWSPAPER
OF THE
BAPTISTS
IN WALES

JUNE 1985

The Reverend W. O. Meredith Powell M.A.,
Arosfa, Llanidloes, Powys. Tel: 055 122452

THANK GOD FOR THE BAPTIST CHURCH

THANK GOD FOR THE BAPTIST CHURCH

By the Rev. George Ingram

It is time someone spoke up in favour of the Baptist Church to which we belong and within which many of us entered into our spiritual life and heritage.

From all sides it seems to be under attack. There are some who go to any lengths to ridicule or attack; ministers are 'unsound' or 'Communist' — or both. Then we get attacks from groups within the Baptist Church, saying we are under judgment, only yet giving more publicity to the very things and people they are against; and describing the denomination as 'disease-ridden' and calls all believers to escape from being 'trapped in denominationalism' as 'Lot escaped from Sodom.'

So, isn't it time we stood up and, as believers committed to Christ as Saviour and Lord, affirmed afresh the joy and value of the Baptist Church — a Church very far

indeed from apostasy, and in which God is graciously and powerfully at work? I believe so!



First, it is a Biblically-based Church

In the ordination service, after the laying on of hands with prayer, there is the giving of authority by the giving of a Bible. The ground of our authority is clear. We do not believe the teaching that when the Apostles died 'they left a vacuum of authority into which the wrong men stepped' i.e. (Ministers). There have been many abuses by Church leaders but this does not lead to the conclusion that they should have been a succession of Apostles instead. The twelve Apostles were unique in their being eye-witnesses of the Risen Christ and as such they cannot have successors. There are all sorts of apostolic ministries but nothing equivalent to the twelve. Instead, the witness of the Apos-

ties is in the New Testament. We are certainly to study, examine and dig at Scripture; we are to be illuminated by careful Biblical scholarship and we may vary in our approaches and conclusions. Within the bound of Biblical scholarship, each minister has every right to express what he believes, and I, have every right to express what I believe — all of us are part of a Biblically-based Church and our beliefs must come to that test.



Second, It is an inclusive Church

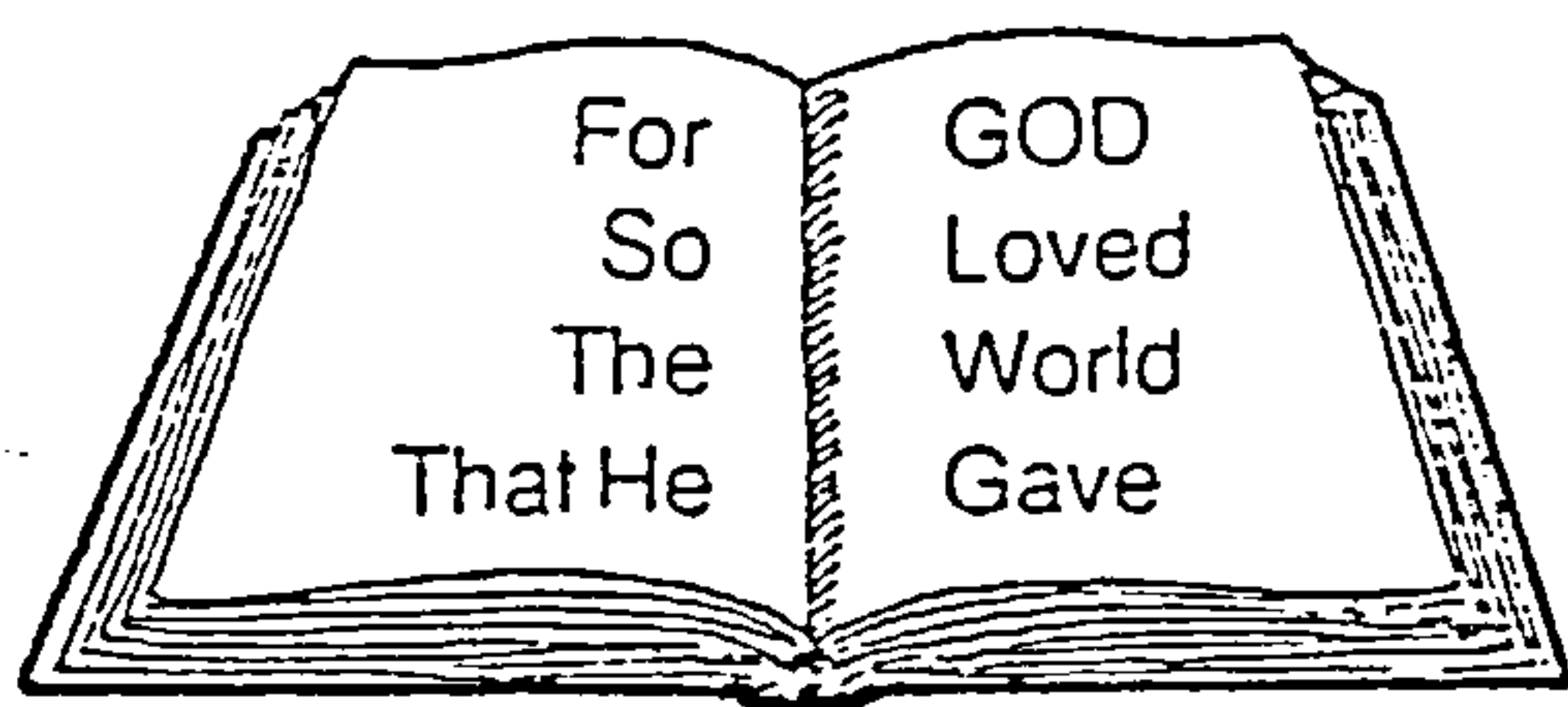
The fact that we contain within the Baptist Church people of varying viewpoints doctrinally, ethically and socially has been our richness and strength. I believe that is still true. The camps that want to expel everyone that does not accept their view would tear us apart; instead, I believe they should contribute positively to the whole Church, so that by respect

THE GWENT WELSH

Journal of the Gwent Welsh Baptist Association

EDITORIAL

Nov. 1985



You will have no doubt read the article, "Why should we have a confession of Faith?" by Rev Jim Webber, which appeared in our last issue. The Executive Committee have discussed the need for a confession of Faith and the Rev's Jim Webber and J.O.G. Brown were asked to draft one.

It is published in this issue and the readers are requested by the Committee to read it in the light of the previously published Doctrinal Statement of the Union and Association. It is important to express an opinion whether a detailed Confession of Faith is indispensable, desirable or acceptable.

A prominent atheist was once asked about her opinion of Christianity, she replied: "Never have so many people belonged to an organisation and yet have known so little about it". Could this apply to us?

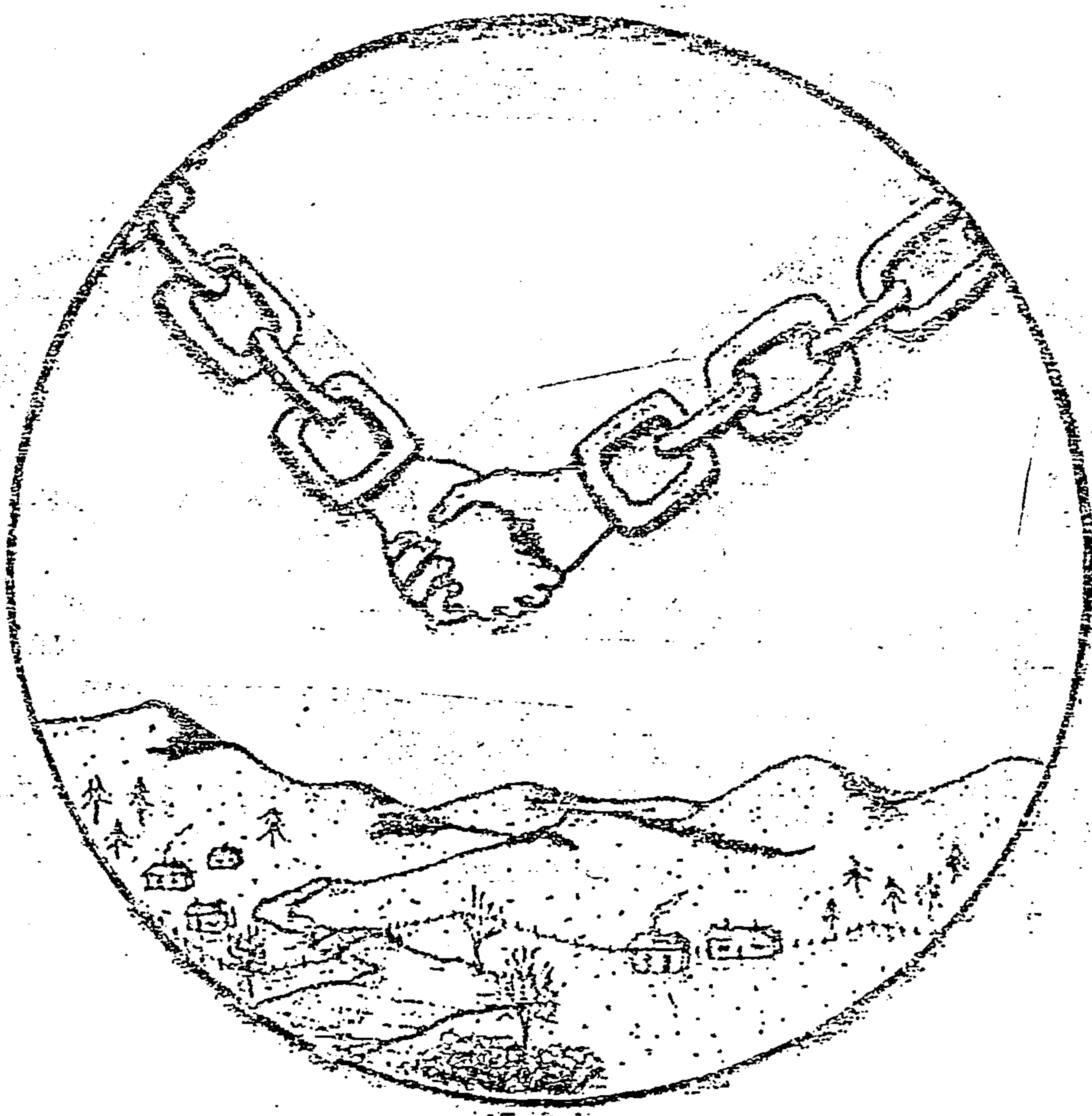
REPORTING PROGRESS by Rev J C Hayward

"More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number" - ACTS 5: 14.

In a day when progress reports are rare and precious, it is good for us to consider this 'Progress Report' which is both inspiring and challenging! Notice:

- A. There are signs of progress which are good - increased offerings; building improvements; increased attendance in services. But this Progress Report has to do with men and women believing in Christ! - souls saved.
- B. This progress was in the face of severe opposition, which was both religious and political. Despite this there was blessing and the Church grew. What was the secret?

MID GLAMORGAN MISSION.



LINK

[Standard cover for the Mid Glamorgan Mission's Newsletter.
This one published in October, 1985.]